PLATO'S THEODICY

The Forgotten Fount

Viktor Ilievski

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The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at https://catalog.loc.gov
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2023941669

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2452-2945
ISBN 978-90-04-67929-0 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-67930-6 (e-book)

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

To Lena,
may she grow up to be virtuous and happy

Contents

Acknowledgements

This book's foundations were laid with the PhD thesis defended in December 2014 at the Central European University in Budapest. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my teachers there, especially to István Bodnár and Gábor Betegh. My sincere gratitude goes to the anonymous referee of the book's manuscript for their insightful comments and criticism, as well as to the people of Spain for the kindness they showed me during the past year. I also give my heartfelt thanks to Silvia De Bianchi, and Gabriela Martinez Sainz and Daniel Vázquez, for their constant support and incredible kindness. Sections 3 and 4 of Chapter II were previously published in 2017 and 2018 under the titles 'Lot-casting, Divine Interference, and Chance in the Myth of Er', *Apeiron* 50, no. 1: 67–79, and 'Theodicy and Moral Responsibility in the Myth of Er', *Apeiron* 51, no. 3: 259–278. Section 3 of Chapter IV was previously published in 2016 under the title 'Plato's Theodicy in the *Timaeus*', *Rhizomata* 4, no. 2: 201–224. They are presented here in somewhat modified versions. This result is part of the PROTEUS project, which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 758145).

Abbreviations

Aeschylus
Ag. = *Agamemnon*

Aristotle
Ath. Pol. = *Athenaion politeia*
Cael. = *De caelo*
Cat. = *Categoriae*
Eth. Nic. = *Ethica Nichomachea*
Metaph. = *Metaphysica*
Phys. = *Physica*
Pol. = *Politica*

Augustine
De civ. D = *De civitate Dei*

Cicero
Nat. D. = *De natura deorum*

Diels-Kranz
DK = *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*

Diogenes Laertius
DL = *Vitae Philosophorum*

Epictetus
Ench. = *Enchiridion*
Epict. Diss. = *Epicteti dissertationes*

Herodotus
Hdt. = *The Histories*

Hesiod
Theog. = *Theogonia*
Op. = *Opera et dies*

Homer
Il. = *Iliad*
Od. = *Odyssey*

Marcus Aurelius
Med. = *Meditationes*

Plato
Alc. I = *Alcibiades I*
Ap. = *Apologia*
Cri. = *Crito*
Euthphr. = *Euthyphro*
Grg. = *Gorgias*
Lach. = *Laches*
Leg. = *Leges*
Men. = *Meno*
Phd. = *Phaedo*
Phdr. = *Phaedrus*
Phlb. = *Philebus*
Plt. = *Politicus*
Prt. = *Protagoras*
Resp. = *Respublica*
Soph. = *Sophista*
Symp. = *Symposium*
Tht. = *Theaetetus*
Tim. = *Timaeus*

Plotinus
Enn. = *Enneades*

Plutarch
De an. proc. = *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*
De tranq. anim. = *De tranquilitate animi*
Quaest. conv. = *Quaestiones convivales*

Proclus
De mal. = *De malorum subsistentia*
In Alc. = *In Platonis Alcibiadem I*
In R. = *In Platonis Rempublicam commentarii*
In Ti. = *In Platonis Timaeum commentarii*

Sophocles
OC = *Oedipus Coloneus*

Theophrastus
Met. = *Metaphysica*

Von Arnim
SVF = *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*

Xenophon
Mem. = *Memorabilia*

Introduction

ἄλλα δὲ μυρία λυγρὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους ἀλάληται·
πλείη μὲν γὰρ γαῖα κακῶν, πλείη δὲ θάλασσα

Yet countless calamities wander among humans;
for filled is the earth with evils, and so filled is the sea
HESIOD, *Op.* 100–101

The truth of Hesiod's observation has rarely been challenged, except perhaps by advocates of the counter-intuitive thesis that the harm inflicted by living creatures to each other and the calamities forced on them by nature are somehow illusory.[1] Even today, in the era of scientific and technological advancement, relatively accessible health services, increasing material prosperity, and the free distribution of information, the suffering and the injustice to which human and non-human animals are subjected do not abate. Poverty and famine take their deadly toll, nations and religious groups wage bloody wars against each other, women and men are raped and brutally slain, children suffer at the hands of their own parents, unnumerable innocent animals die in agony for the sake of human pleasure, and other unspeakable atrocities ceaselessly occur, often in plain sight. Nature seems no less brutal: vile diseases, extreme temperatures, earthquakes, and floods claim their victims all too often; wildfires rage and destroy lives and property. We are understandably shocked by the pain and distress that humans and animals suffer, and awestruck when the unbounded power of nature wreaks havoc and destruction on Earth. We are also dismayed, though in a different way, by the diseases of the soul: envy, treachery, perjury, covetousness, irrepressible lust, which morally responsible people condemn, either in others or in their own selves. Finally,

1 For a brief analysis of this interpretation of suffering and evil, see Davies 1993, 33 and 36. Herman 1993 calls it the Illusion Solution to the problem of evil, and discusses it together with twenty other theodicean strategies. For the Illusion Solution, see especially Herman 1993, 24, 37–41, 62–64. The archetype of the professional academic speaking from the ivory tower of his or her university office embodies another type of denial. Thus Greene 1935, 1: 'That this is on the whole a good world, and that man is on the whole happy, we are generally agreed'.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004679306_002

every rational human being is perplexed, if not horrified, by the fugitive and corruptible nature of everything in this life, as well as by the imminence of death. We often ponder these facts, events, and mental states, which may all be categorised – perhaps not wholly accurately – as 'evil'.

We ought now to delineate clearly the meaning ascribed to the term 'evil' for the purpose of this study. This equivocal term encompasses a complex concept, and yet is often considered self-explanatory in modern debates.[2] Sometimes, the authors that explore it are content with simply mentioning referents of the term. Peterson, for instance, notes that evil is recognised in its variants of natural and moral evil and provides a few examples.[3] Plantinga illustrates his claim that 'the world does indeed contain a great deal of evil'[4] with quotations describing types of suffering inflicted on human beings by nature and by other humans, and with one example of utter moral decadence. Hume provides a much more extensive – although by no means exhaustive – list of causes for the 'misery and wickedness of men'[5] in Part 10 of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. And the catalogue of authors who define evil ostensively, i.e., by pointing out instances of moral and natural evil could go on.[6] An obvious feature of such characterisations of evil is that it is seen as mostly, if not exclusively, inseparable from the mental and physical anguish experienced by sentient beings – human beings in particular.

Herman's description of evil is more comprehensive both in scope and in reference, because it incorporates feelings of disappointment with the workings of Providence and encompasses non-human animals and angels as well. He identifies multiple forms of evil, which 'range from unfulfilled ritual requests and unanswered prayers, to the tragic loss of loved ones and friends, to pain, anxiety and death for oneself and others, and to the suffering

2 For example, Vardy 1992 at the outset of his work does not attempt to define the notion of evil he is going to write about.

3 See Peterson 1992, 2.

4 Plantinga 1974a, 7.

5 Hume 2007 [1799], 68.

6 Plantinga 174b, 166 defines moral and natural evil as follows: 'The former is evil that results from some human being's going wrong with respect to an action that is morally significant for him; any other evil is natural evil'. In contemporary debates, the metaphysical aspect of evil seems to be ignored. Leibniz was the first philosopher to propose a tripartite taxonomy of evil: metaphysical, natural (or physical), and moral: 'Evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. *Metaphysical evil* consists in mere imperfection, *physical evil* in suffering, and *moral evil* in sin' 2007 [1710], 139. For a brief but adequate description of these three types of evil, see Hick 2010, 12–14. For a more detailed discussion of the Leibnizian notion of metaphysical evil, see Antognazza 2014. The present study will briefly explore whether this division of evils is applicable to Plato as well.

of sentient creatures in general and on the sub-human, and, possibly, super-human levels'.[7] Van Inwagen is more concise, and less precise: 'The word 'evil' when it occurs in phrases like 'the argument from evil' or 'the problem of evil' means 'bad things''.[8]

Singer's account of evil, while rich and detailed, is confined to the psychological aspect, and explains the phenomenon as a mental trait of deranged human beings. Evil is, therefore, dependent on the malicious intentions of a moral agent, and is defined as 'doing or willing [...] what is bad for its own sake. *This is what evil, in its most extreme or malignant form, consists in*'.[9] However, the 'bad', in Singer's interpretation, is beyond ordinary badness; it refers to acts 'horrendously wrong, that cause immense suffering and are done with an evil intention or from an evil motive, the intention or motive to do something horrendously wrong causing immense unwarranted suffering'.[10]

Because of this psychological understanding of evil as wicked maliciousness, some philosophers cease, or refrain from, using the term 'evil' and replace it with 'badness'. This will not be the case in this study, primarily because the term has entered common usage – we are troubled by 'the problem of evil', not 'the problem of badness'. Besides, two additional meanings of the term 'evil' can be identified, alongside Singer's interpretation as the purposeful maliciousness that is in itself the goal of a particular action. These are the colloquial sense, found in phrases such as 'necessary evil' or 'lesser of two evils',[11] and the so-called broad sense: 'Ordinary English reserves the term 'evil' for what is *morally* sinister, but philosophers and theologians have for centuries lumped all of life's 'minuses' together under that rubric, giving 'evil' a very wide significance'.[12]

7 Herman 1993, VIII–IX.

8 van Inwagen 2006, 4.

9 Singer 2004, 204. For a similar understanding of evil – as distinguishable from the bad, including the morally bad, which is culpable, but not wicked – see Hauskeller 2022, 140–142. Hauskeller suggests that a morally bad act – like theft or tax evasion – may be understandable and can even be performed by a 'good person'. Evil deeds, on the other hand, are beyond the morally wrong and can be committed only by evil, 'rotten to the core' individuals, such as a sex trafficker or a sadist killing for pleasure.

10 Singer 2004, 205. Chignell 2019, 3–5, suggests that three different visions of 'radical evil' currently prevail: (a) increased badness; (b) proper 'Singerian' maliciousness; (c) a malevolent force of various possible natures and origins.

11 In such phrases, 'evil' is tinged with irony and employed for dramatic effect. For an example of the use of 'don't be evil' for ironic emphasis in the business world, see Chan 2019, 450–455.

12 Adams and Adams 1990, 1. See also Hick 2010, 12: 'In English 'evil' is usually, although not always, used in a comprehensive sense, and we then distinguish under it the moral evil of

Likewise, 'evil' in this study shall be used to refer to any phenomenon – including actions of living beings – that thwarts an individual's attempt to reach happiness. This includes all the harm done by wicked humans, as well as a person's own vices; natural disasters, devastating illnesses – physical and mental – as well as injuries caused by and to non-human animals; the transient and imperfect nature of life, as well as the inability to be everything we could or would like to be. In this study, 'badness' and 'bad things' are considered as synonyms of 'evil', as warranted by van Inwagen and others.

The evils that human and non-human animals experience and commit are thus both numerous and wide-ranging.[13] As such, they confront the afflicted individual with a variety of challenges, and subsequently cause several related, and yet distinct, problems of evil. Perhaps the most acute example is the practical predicament of surviving in a physically and ethically hostile environment. No sentient being is spared from the tangible consequences of the ubiquitous presence of evil in the known universe: the perils of bodily and mental suffering, and, ultimately, death.

This also poses the existential problem of finding value and positive purpose in a life of constant struggle that inevitably ends in defeat. Unless they find themselves utterly broken by some terrible loss or crippling neurosis, human beings not only fight untiringly for preservation, but also search desperately for meaning, sometimes even unconsciously. Indeed, illustrious thinkers, from Plato to Viktor Frankl[14] and beyond, have attempted to grasp and communicate the meaning of a life beset with the horrors of affliction, anguish, and

wickedness and such non-moral evils as disease and natural disaster', and Hickson 2013, 3: 'If we understand 'evil' broadly, as most contemporary philosophers do, to mean 'all bad things' – for example, physical and mental suffering, intentional wrongdoing, error, and poverty […]'. Swinburne 1998, 10, replaces 'evil' with 'bad', reserving the term 'evil' to describe a moral agent, whose intentions are evil. Earthquakes, floods, famines, bear attacks, are therefore bad, but not evil – not evil as only a conscious agent can be. Yet Adams and Adams, and Hick, point out that they may still be understood as evils in the broader sense. Ordinary English also distinguishes between badness and evil on account of severity: for instance, 'bad weather' is a suitable description of an unpleasantly rainy day, while it would be appropriate to refer to a rainstorm resulting in destructive floods as 'a great evil'. Furthermore, Swinburne has no qualms about using the term 'evil' in phrases such as 'moral evils', 'natural evils', or 'problem of evil'.

13 Non-human animals are, of course, incapable of perpetrating moral evil, and unaware that their actions cause physical suffering.

14 See Frankl 1992, an astounding account of survival in the utterly inhumane and brutal conditions of the Nazi concentration camps through the healing powers of 'the will to meaning'.

mortality. The success or failure of their philosophies may only be measured by each individual encountering them.

The pervasiveness of injustice and suffering also engenders crises of faith. As a devout individual observes or endures gratuitous evil, they may question the foundations of their belief, or even abandon it. A well-known – although certainly not isolated – example is the rise of atheism among the Jewish people after World War II. The attempts at resolving such issues fall under the jurisdiction of a priest.

Finally, the facticity of evil presents a challenge – or an opportunity – to the philosopher or the theologian, who, relying predominantly on reason, may embark on a purely theoretical enterprise to either justify the existence of God in the face of evil, or to argue that the existence of God is irreconcilable with the abundance of agony and immorality in this world.

The notorious 'problem of evil' can therefore be subdivided into four categories: physical, existential, religious, and philosophical. While these four types of problem of evil share many common characteristics, they may require widely different approaches in order to be explained or solved. The focus of this work is not on the anthropological, psychological, or pastoral issues that surround the first three types, nor on the broader metaphysical considerations that underlie all four of them. Rather, our study concentrates on the philosophical problem of evil,[15] and more specifically on the theistic response to it known as theodicy. Unlike the physical and existential problems of evil, the philosophical problem of evil does not arise until the existence of God is taken into consideration.[16] While this is also true of the religious problem of evil, the resolution of the latter is sought through clerical intervention and doctrinal persuasion, whereas the discussion of the former remains within the domain of logic and rational argument. In addition, the religious problem of evil is always personal and involving emotions, owing to the private nature of the losses or doubts that trigger it, while the philosophical problem of evil can, more often than not, be considered from the safe distance provided by the natural detachment associated with pure theorising.

The philosophical problem of evil is almost universally recognised as an especially formidable weapon in the hands of atheistic thinkers who are

15 A problem that is also multiform: '[w]hat philosophers today call '*the* problem of evil' [...] despite the definite article, denotes a family of challenges to belief in a God who is supremely benevolent and powerful', Hickson 2013, 3.

16 As it shall be suggested below, this does not pertain to the God of the Abrahamic religions only, but also includes the Divinity of non-classical theologies, as well as some pre-monotheistic equivalents.

intent on disproving God's existence. Indeed, it may seem difficult to reconcile the very concept of a Deity endowed with omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence with the factual omnipresence of wickedness and misery in our world. As such, it is unsurprising that the question 'why does God permit the presence of evils?' should present itself. Hume writes, paraphrasing Epicurus:[17] 'Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?'[18]

Such questions are not unfounded. Indeed, if an all-knowing God existed, he would be aware of every instance of injustice and pain inflicted or suffered; if he were all-good, he would not allow evils to beset his creatures; if he were all-powerful, he would be able to prevent or suppress the occurrence of evil. God's existence, his possession of the three divine attributes mentioned above, and the facticity of evil, seem altogether incompatible. To postulate these three propositions simultaneously results in a paradox in which, some thinkers may claim, the theist or theologian is trapped. 'In its simplest form, the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that any two of them were true the third would be false'.[19] The so-called logical argument from evil, which stems from the problem of evil, seeks to demonstrate 'not merely that traditional theism lacks rational support, but rather that it is positively irrational',[20] i.e., to disprove the existence of God as conceived in traditional theism.[21] As the soundness of the logical argument from evil attracted severe criticism, the evidential argument from evil was introduced as a less rigid alternative, suggesting that the presence of horrendous evil is strong evidence against the existence of God, or that it makes God's existence highly improbable.[22]

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17 For Epicurus' formulation of the problem of evil, see p. 36 below.

18 Hume 2007 [1799], 74.

19 Mackie 1955, 200. See also McCloskey 1960, 97: 'Evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other. God cannot be both all-powerful and perfectly good if evil is real'. For an early and rather effective rebuttal of the 'contradiction thesis', see Plantinga 1974a, 12–24.

20 Mackie 1982, 149.

21 Traditional theism is to be understood as '[t]he form of theism which maintains that there is a creator God who is all good and all powerful, where being all knowing is subsumed under being all powerful', Sterba 2019, 8, footnote 10.

22 For a brief presentation of both kinds of arguments from evil, see van Inwagen 2006, 8. For a more sustained introductory discussion, see Adams and Adams 1990, 2–18. For a detailed analysis of the arguments and related issues, see McBrayer and Howard-Snyder 2013, 1–173. The logical argument from evil is difficult to defend, on account of its overambitious agenda (see Mackie's own admission to this effect in 1982, 154). Establishing that

Faced with the challenge posed by the philosophical or theological problem of evil, a theist may endeavour to 'justifie the wayes of God to man',[23] opt for 'the defending of God's cause'.[24] This intellectual enterprise has become known as theodicy.[25] A theodicy – in the narrow sense of the word, as it is nowadays universally used[26] – regards God's existence as an axiomatic truth and counteracts the arguments from evil by trying to explain why God would permit sin and suffering. It often does so by postulating a higher good, whose existence is facilitated by the presence of evil, and which provides God with a morally sufficient reason to allow the latter. Within the range of responses to the arguments from evil, contemporary philosophers of religion usually distinguish between *theodicy* and *defence*. Theodicy stands for the attempt to explain plausibly how a world full of evils could be compatible with the existence of an omnibenevolent creator,[27] while the purpose of a defence is not to offer a credible justification of the pervasiveness of evil, but simply to demonstrate that a given argument from evil is invalid, i.e., that the presence of evil is not logically incompatible with the existence of God, or that it does not exclude it.[28]

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the coexistence of God and evil is logically possible suffices to refute it, and it is widely accepted that already Alvin Planting has made a successful case. More recent essays, such as Oppy 2017, fail to breathe new life into this question. The debate regarding the cluster of logical arguments was reignited by Sterba 2019, who claims that his novel approach, unlike John Mackie's, establishes the logical impossibility of God. For responses to Sterba, see Beaty 2021, Feser 2021, Hasker 2021, Huffling 2021, Reichenbach 2021.

As far as the evidential argument from evil is concerned, an early critique is found in Plantinga 1974a, 59–64. However, the argument gained its deserved prominence later, with Rowe 1979. For further references and an overview of the (pre-Sterba) debate concerning both kinds of arguments, see Ilievski 2020, 1–3.

23 Milton, PL I.26.

24 Kant 1996 [1791].

25 The term is derived from the Greek words θεός, 'god', and δίκη, 'justice', and consequently translates as 'justification of God'. It was introduced by Leibniz, in his 1710 work *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*.

26 In the rare broader sense, 'theodicy' refers both to the defence of God's goodness and to the philosophical treatment of issues concerned with proving God's existence and his possession of divine attributes. In this sense, 'theodicy' becomes equivalent to natural theology. It seems that Ritter 1933, 380–382 uses the term in this broader sense when he speaks of Plato's theodicy in the *Laws*.

27 Swinburne 1988, 292 defines theodicy as 'a justified account of how [the] evils do (contrary to appearance) serve a greater good'.

28 See Plantinga 1974a, 27–29; Adams and Adams 1990, 3; Peterson 1992, 7–8; van Inwagen 2006, 5–8. Tooley 2021, 4 mentions refutation besides theodicy and defence. Refutation is the strongest possible answer to the problem of evil. Its goal is to establish that 'there are no facts about evil in the world that make it even *prima facie* unreasonable to believe in the existence of God'.

The theological language used so far may give the impression that the philosophical problem of evil and the necessity of theodicy apply only to the so-called Abrahamic faiths. According to some critics, the problem of evil is irrelevant both for atheists and for religious thinkers who do not fully recognise the tenets of Biblical monotheism, such as, among others, all pre-Judeo-Christian theistic philosophers. That is to say, the problem of evil would affect only believers in the God of the Pentateuch and his later transformations. This Divine Being became known primarily as the possessor of the deiform attributes of omnibenevolence, omnipotence and omniscience, but also as the one who created the cosmos *ex nihilo*.[29] The rationale of such a conception is clear: if a God is not all-powerful, or if he makes the world from pre-existing matter, then he cannot be blamed for the deterioration of this world, since there exists factors or entities beyond his control.[30]

However, these conditions cannot be fostered as the standard for determining a thinker's interest or disinterest in the problem of evil and in the possible answers to it. A sufficient proof of this is the very existence of ancient theodicies and theodicies expounded by adherents to non-classical theism. Some uncontroversial examples of such undertakings are the Stoic and the Plotinian theodicy from the first camp,[31] and the process theodicies from the second.[32] Plato provides another example. Although the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* was foreign to the Greek mind, and although Plato's creator God was not wholly omnipotent,[33] Plato did formulate a consistent theodicy.

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29 For the early Patristic debate on creation from nothing and its Platonic and Hellenistic influences, see Karamanolis 2021, 61–88.

30 Some authors rely on detailed criteria related to the pertinence of the problem. Vardy 1992, 18–19 lists five assumptions: (a) God is omnipotent; (b) He creates *ex nihilo;* (c) He remains interested in the world after its creation; (d) He is good; (e) He does not wish suffering to occur. Other authors consider the omnipotence and omnibenevolence theses sufficient, e.g., Dubs 1931, 554–555; Hick 2010, 4; Mackie 1955, 200. Yet it is reasonable to assume that, for a Christian thinker or critic, omnipotence includes the ability to create something from nothing. For a further definition of the attribute of omnipotence, see also p. 6 above.

31 For a concise discussion of these two theodicies and further references, see Ilievski 2018.

32 Process theists typically contest, or reconceive, the classical notions of certain divine attributes – omnipotence especially. Process theodicies are expounded and defended by Ford 1992, Griffin 2017, Keller 2013, Reichenbach 2017. For notes and further references on non-classical (including ancient) theologies and theodicies, see Ilievski 2020, 10–12.

33 Plato's Demiurge fashions the world out of pre-existing material. This material, known as Necessity, resists and partly thwarts the creator's noble intentions; as a result, he does not create the best possible world *simpliciter*, but only a world which is as good as it can be *under the given circumstances*. For a brief refutation of the suggestion that (Platonic) theodicy is impossible unless the omnipotence thesis is accepted, see Ilievski 2020, 11–12.

He was intrigued and troubled by the presence of evil in our world, and keen to disconnect it from his gods as much as possible. Plato may not have written any work solely dedicated to the problem of evil and to theodicy,[34] but his interest in these matters manifests itself in his dialogues through explicit statements that will be examined in this study. His writings offer no systematic discussion of these subjects, and the remarks scattered throughout the Platonic corpus cannot be easily organised into a transparently univocal position. Nevertheless, this is a symptom of Plato's philosophical method, whereby he constantly re-examines crucial doctrines and conclusions, rather than a sign of lack of interest in the problem of evil and theodicy. For '[n]o system of philosophy which proposes to explain the mysteries of existence can leave untouched the undeniable and perplexing fact of wraps and imperfections in the fabric of our life, seemingly inherent in the very tissue of which it is woven'.[35]

Thus, the key thesis developed and defended in this study is that Plato offers a relatively comprehensive and undoubtedly influential theodicy. His reflections on the correlation between the deity and this wretched world is the fount from which many subsequent thinkers quenched their thirst,[36] and yet Plato's contribution to theodicy remains unacknowledged today. His efforts belong to the category of theodicy rather than defence – although he would have been unaware of such a subtle distinction – since he seems to be suggesting plausible reasons why the presence of evil is not incompatible with God's omnibenevolence. Throughout the dialogues, Plato both postulates and argues for God's existence and goodness, and tries to explain how the Deity he envisions fits into the gloomy reality of the world as we know it – which are the building blocks of a *bona fide* theodicy.

More concretely, Plato accepts as true the following propositions: (a) God exists;[37] (b) God is good;[38] (c) God is interested in the proper management

34 Unlike Plotinus, for example. See *Enn.* I.8 and III.2–3.

35 Chilcott 1923, 27.

36 *Pace* Bledsoe 1854, 11–15; Dubs 1931, 554; Steel 1995, and, to some extent, Broadie 2001 (however, cf. the essay on Plato's theodicy in Lanzi 2000, 105–140). My contention is that Plato's theodicy is much more elaborate than usually acknowledged and that its formative influence on the Stoic and Plotinian theodicies, and, through these, on later theodicies, is not negligible. Since Ilievski 2018 deals with the dependence of the Stoic and Plotinian theodicies on Plato's own theodicy, this issue will not be developed extensively again here.

37 Dombrowski 2005, 81–94 gives an account of the Platonic arguments for the existence of God in the *Republic*, *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. In his interpretation of the *Republic*, he equates the Form of the Good with Plato's God, which may not reflect what Plato had in mind. Mayhew 2008 provides a detailed analysis of the arguments in *Laws* X (61–63, and 104–192).

38 See, e.g., *Tim.* 29e–30a; *Leg.* 897c–898c.

of cosmic and human affairs;[39] (d) God is capable of performing every task a divine being can perform.[40] On the other hand, he is adamant that (e) evils exist in, even predominate, the created universe.[41] Therefore the philosophical problem of evil does arise for Plato, and, as a theistic philosopher, he attempts to solve it by proposing a theodicy. Finally, it should be mentioned that even though the puzzle of the origin and metaphysics of evil deserves a monograph of its own and cannot be satisfactorily considered in this study, it will be inevitable to touch upon that question occasionally. In a word, the view expressed here is that Plato had a consistent theory of evil,[42] for existence of which he blamed primarily the corporeal constituent of the universe.[43]

The endeavours to explicate Plato's theodicy undertaken in the five chapter of the present book are founded on the analysis of *Republic* II and X, *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus*, and *Laws* X – in that particular order.[44]

Chapter 1 is dedicated to the exploration and interpretation of the relevant passages of *Republic* II. It highlights the Homeric-Hesiodic fallacy of presenting the gods as bestowers of both good and evil, identifies Plato's response to it, draws an outline of his theology, discusses Plato's formulation – albeit somewhat indirect – of the problem of evil, and, most importantly, the emergence of the first recorded theodicy in the history of the Western world.

Chapter 2 focuses on the closing section of *Republic* X – the fascinating Myth of Er. After dwelling on some peculiarities of the Myth, it conveys Plato's first clear-cut theodicean strategy, which we suggest naming 'Solution from Personal Responsibility'. This strategy is anchored in the idea that 'the responsibility is upon him who makes the choice; God is guiltless' (*Resp*. 617e4–5).

39 See *Resp*. 365d–e; *Leg*. 885b, 899d–905d.

40 See *Leg*. 901d.

41 See, e.g., *Resp.* 379c2–7, *Tht.* 176a5–8, *Leg.* 900d7–e9 and 906a2–b3. Plato in these passages observes that the evils are unavoidable and more numerous in our lives than the good things, but also that God is neither affected by, nor responsible for the former.

42 *Pace* Lewis 1845, Greene 1948, Meldrum 1950, Mohr 1981, Nightingale 1996, Parry 2002.

43 *Pace* Cherniss 1954, Chilcott 1923, Clegg 1976, Cornford 1997 [1937], Morrow 1950, Taylor 1928, Wood 2009. See IV.5 below.

44 The relative chronology of Plato's dialogues is a contended issue, but the above arrangement does not appear to be very controversial. It follows the common (post-Campbellian) dating of the *Republic*, *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus,* which places the *Theaetetus* among the (later) middle dialogues, and the *Timaeus* among the late group. The status of the *Laws* as Plato's final work is uncontested; see Brandwood 1992 and Bostock 1988, 1–8. For further information on the anteriority of the *Republic* to the *Theaetetus*, see Cornford 1935, 1–2 and Sedley 2004, 10. As for the *Timaeus*, Owen's arguments in favour of its earlier composition (1953), have been successfully rebutted by Cherniss 1957. Thus also Ferrari 2022, XVII; however, cf. Bostock 1988, 8–9.

Furthermore, this chapter addresses the problems arising from this strategy and from its textual context, such as the question of freedom of choice and of the ensuing moral accountability in a seemingly deterministic world; the role of chance in such a world; and the preservation of personal identity and responsibility over consecutive lifetimes arising from Plato's adherence to the theory of metempsychosis.

Chapter 3 engages with the *Theaetetus*, more precisely with its famous Digression on philosophic life. A brief discussion of key elements in the Digression leads to an analysis of the passage addressing the notion of evil (*Tht*. 176a5–8), and underlines its importance for Plato's understanding of the metaphysics of evil. Most importantly, this chapter provides an interpretation of the statements relevant to a theodicean reading of the closing section of the Digression. This interpretation suggests that the theodicy of the *Theaetetus* is akin to what is known nowadays as Soul-making, or Irenaean type of theodicy.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the *Timaeus*. It opens with Plato's rebuttal of the idea expounded by the poets that the gods could be afflicted by the vice of envy. Three theodicean strategies can be identified in the *Timaeus*: first, Plato's anticipation of the Principle of Plenitude and its theodicean significance. Second, the aforementioned Solution from Personal Responsibility, which places the blame for evil on the moral agent. Third, the Recalcitrant Entity Solution, a theodicean strategy according to which the responsibility for some evils may be transferred from God onto the refractory pre-existing material from which he built the world.

Chapter 5 turns to *Laws* x and begins with a brief discussion of Plato's natural theology and of the preamble to the legislature on impiety and religious offences. The theodicy of *Laws* x is enclosed within the framework of that preamble. An analysis of *Laws* x shows Plato setting in this work the foundation for what was going to become famous as the Aesthetic Solution to the problem of evil, or the Aesthetic Theme. Its objective is to affirm that the seeming blemishes observable in the world fit well into, and even contribute to, the overall beauty and perfection of the universe. Two theodicean strategies are discussed in this chapter besides the Aesthetic Theme: the Solution from Personal Responsibility, and a strategy we suggest calling the 'Justice in the Afterlife Solution'.

CHAPTER 1

The Problem of Evil and Theodicy in *Republic* 379b–c

This chapter focuses on Plato's brief but significant and ground-breaking discussion of the problem of evil in *Republic* II, in the wake of his protest against traditional religion. The main claim submitted here is that the relevant passages of *Republic* II contain the first recorded justification of God's goodness in the history of Western philosophy. To support this assertion, section 1.1 examines Plato's primary motive for initiating his rudimentary defence of God – his intention to invalidate the conviction, widely embraced by the Homeric-Hesiodic religion, that God dispenses both good and evil to humanity. Section 1.2 reviews Plato's rebuttal of this erroneous belief in *Republic* 376e–380c. Section 1.3, a necessary digression, briefly explores the basic principles of Plato's theology, since it would be impossible to grasp his theodicy without defining first the concept of θεός with which he operates. Section 1.4 presents Plato's pioneering interpretation of the problem of evil, from which stems the novel idea of theodicy. Finally, section 1.5 addresses doubts which have been expressed as to the very existence of Platonic theodicy, suggesting that Plato was not interested in justifying the ways of God and that such discussions are absent from his oeuvre. This final section aims to demonstrate that Plato has indeed sown in *Republic* II the seeds of a theodicy – however rudimentary – which later fructified in more profound accounts.

Plato the religious reformer commences his campaign with the resolution to face and subvert 'the biggest lie about the most important matters'.[1] He is referring to the idea, adopted and transmitted by the poets,[2] that the gods act whimsically and are often selfish, cruel, and unjust. Plato leaves their mutual dealings aside and abstains from interpreting episodes such as the Theomachy of *Iliad* XX–XXI and other instances of morally reprehensible acts perpetuated among the gods themselves. The great censor of Kallipolis, although hinting that such stories might have allegorical meanings, simply bans them from his

1 τὸ μέγιστον καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ψεῦδος, *Resp.* 377e6–7. (Unless indicated otherwise, the translations from Greek are the author's). Discarding misconceptions regarding the gods is a crucial step towards achieving good life: see *Leg.* 888a7–b4.

2 See Destrée and Herrmann 2011, a noteworthy collection of articles, many of which discuss the divergence between Plato and the poets.

 DOI:10.1163/9789004679306_003

city.[3] Even if tales like those narrating Uranus' cruelty, Cronos' retaliation,[4] and Zeus' revenge were true[5] – which is highly unlikely – they must be kept secret and shared only with a select few, whose purified souls would not become corrupted by such stories.[6]

Instead, Plato focuses on the gods' interactions with the world and the creatures inhabiting it, since from these stem, in the works of the early poets, two theologically pernicious, and yet widespread, misconceptions, which ultimately lead to 'the biggest lie'. These misconceptions are (a) the belief that *everything* comes from God, and (b) the notion of divine envy or grudge, prompted by grandiose human achievements. Despite the philosophers'[7] and the dramatists'[8] occasional complaints against these misconceptions, by the Classical period they were already deeply rooted into the Greek mind. Plato deals with the first one – the idea that the gods dispense both good and evil – in *Republic* II, 379a–380c especially, and engages with the problem of divine envy, very concisely, in *Timaeus* 29d–30a. As already mentioned, this chapter focuses on the theodicy of the *Republic* II and the first misconception; the second misconception will be addressed in Chapter 4.

1.1 Traditional Religion's First Profanation: Gods as Causes of Both Good and Evil

When it comes to the divine regulation of human affairs, Plato readily acknowledges that the gods provide good and beneficial things to humanity; the problem lies in the belief that they also cause evil and dispense undesirable things and phenomena. This belief is manifest from the very beginning of recorded literary history. It occurs in Homer's *Iliad*, and is abundantly repeated in the *Odyssey*[9] and in Hesiod's works.[10]

3 Lest they should irreversibly damage the character of the most vulnerable, the city's children. They must instead listen to the best tales of virtue and excellence. See *Resp.* 378b1–e3.

4 See *Theog.* 154–210.

5 See *Theog.* 453–506.

6 See *Resp.* 378a2–6.

7 Most notably Heraclitus, DK B42, and Xenophanes, DK B11–12.

8 See Aeschylus, *Ag.* 750–762.

9 Despite the now widely accepted idea that the gods of the *Odyssey* are morally more advanced than those of the *Iliad*, '[t]he same morality and theology underline both epics', Allan 2006, 26.

10 'One should resist attempts to interpret the gods of Hesiod as if they were different from those of Homer', Allan 2006, 27. Even though moral improvement is observable in the

The main idea conveyed to the reader of the Homeric and Hesiodic epics seems to be that the human world is the chessboard, the playground upon which the gods – and most specifically their leader and master, Zeus – exercise their immense and unfathomable power. In the opening lines of the *Iliad* (I.1–5), Homer suggests that the recent accumulation of warriors' souls in the underworld, the apparent cause of which had been Achilles' wrath, should instead be considered as the fulfilment of Zeus' will or plan (Διὸς δ᾽ ἐτελείετο βουλή).[11] This idea is a common expression of the post-naturalistic, yet still early, non-reflexive concept of the world and of the distribution of justice within it. The entirety of human experience – good, evil and their mixture – stems from the mighty powers that control both the workings of nature and the individual's destiny. The governance of human fate is ascribed to Zeus especially, the highest deity of the Greek Pantheon; in Homer, he is ταμίας ἀγαθῶν τε κακῶν τε[12] – the one who directs the distribution of good and evil. He assumes the function of dispenser of both good and bad things, since the poet does not suggest the existence of an evil force akin to the devil, unless it is Ate.[13] Her role, however, is limited, and being Zeus' daughter, she falls ultimately under his control. Ate is strong and swift and often strives to harm men, but protection against her influence is provided by the Prayers, who are also Zeus' progeny.[14] Furthermore, she appears unable to act independently. After

Works and Days in comparison to the *Iliad* (see *Op.* 213–292; 320–335; Nelson 1997, Beal 2005/2006), and in spite of sporadic efforts from some of the Pre–Socratic thinkers, the task of proper theologising was left to Plato. The gods of Homer and Hesiod were the deities of poets, not theologians (cf. Grube 1951, 65–66). Calhoun 1939, 25–28 proposes a different interpretation, and argues that Homer envisioned a dual role for the gods; sometimes they were to be seen as the *dramatis personae* of ancient myths and popular folk lore, but at other times, as the majestic rulers of the universe. They are depicted as whimsical, unrestrained, often comical characters in the first case, but dignified guardians of truth and justice in the second.

11 *Il.* I.5. In his study of the influence of the *Epic Cycle* on the problem of good and evil, Greene 1948, 63 highlights one interpretation, among others, of Διὸς βουλή suggested by an unknown Homeric scholiast: 'Zeus deliberately caused the war in order to relieve the encumbered earth from an excess of population'. The scholiast supports this claim with a quotation from the lost *Cypria* (see *Cypria* 3, Evelyn-White 1943, 496). Remarkably, easing the earth's burden is mentioned as one of the reasons why Krishna did not attempt to prevent the bloody fratricidal war depicted in the great Indian epic *Mahābhārata* (ca. fourth century BCE).

12 Quoted in Adam 1911, 193. The phrase is an adaptation of a line of unknown origin, found in *Republic* 379e1: οὐδ› ὡς ταμίας ἡμῖν Ζεὺς / ἀγαθῶν τε κακῶν τε τέτυκται – 'nor has Zeus been made for us into the dispenser of both goods and evils'.

13 The Greek word ἄτη means 'infatuation', 'delusion', 'guilt', 'transgression', etc.

14 *Il.* IX.500–515.

his reconciliation with Achilles, Agamemnon absolves himself from the disastrous consequences of his decision to take Briseis from Achilles by claiming that savage Ate was the instigator of his despicable action,[15] before adding that Ate (as well as Moira and Fury) was sent by Zeus to cloud his mind. Similarly, Achilles identifies Zeus as the one who sends prodigious follies (ἄτας) upon mankind.[16] Ate therefore remains an immediate cause, nurtured and controlled by higher powers.

The *Iliad* offers further examples of cases in which the turn of events, somebody's ruin or exaltation, are directly attributable to the ill or good will of Zeus. Thus, before the commencement of one of the great battles between the Achaeans and the Trojans, Zeus sprinkles a bloody dew from the heavens, signifying his intention to send many brave warriors to Hades on that day.[17] At XIV.64–81 Agamemnon suggests that the defeat of his army is predetermined by Zeus and that they should sail back to their respective hometowns rather than continue fighting. Odysseus retorts that Zeus has already ordained hardships and bloodshed for them all until their death; sailing away instead of protecting them from danger, would only bring them shame, and contempt from their enemies.[18] In the *Odyssey*, Nestor blames Zeus for inflicting ruinous doom upon the Achaeans.[19] During his famous journey to the underworld, Odysseus tries to soothe Ajax's resentment[20] by claiming that Zeus is solely responsible[21] both for the demise of Ajax, and for the sufferings of the Achaeans.

Zeus, however, is not the only god capable of altering the destiny of the mortals. Apollo, for example, is accountable for the quarrel between Achilles

15 *Il.* XIX.85–94. Finkelberg 1995, 16 calls this passage 'a *locus classicus* illustrating how Homeric man would account for behaviour derived from *ate*'. She adds: 'the characteristic features of this kind of behaviour are a temporary lack of understanding; attribution of the act to some external factor, usually the gods; and the fact that the agent is not recognised either by himself or by others as an autonomous causer of what he has done'. The conjunction of these features relieves the agent from the responsibility for his action, unlike one who acts under the influence of his own ἀτασθαλίη ('wickedness', 'recklessness', 'arrogance', 'folly'). See Zeus' words in *Od.* I.33–35, about Aegisthus' unspeakable crime: 'Alas, just see how eager mortals are to blame the gods! For, from us, they say, evils come, while they in fact on account of their own wickedness suffer sorrows beyond what is ordained'. Plato too vehemently states that human error and wrongdoing ought not to be imputed to divine agents.

16 *Il.* XIX.270.

17 *Il.* XI.53–55.

18 *Il.* XIV.82–87.

19 *Od.* III.152.

20 *Od.* XI.554–562.

21 οὐδέ τις ἄλλος αἴτιος, ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς, O*d.* XI.558–559.

and Agamemnon.[22] During the fierce duel between Aeneas and Achilles, Hera urges Poseidon to act according to his own will, and either spare Aeneas or let him die.[23] At IV.14–19, Zeus sparks the anger of Hera and Athena when he suggests that the Olympians end the war and spare Priam and his city by returning Helen to Menelaus. Hera vows that her resolve will not slacken and that she will not rest until Troy is reduced to ruins. In this last instance especially, the world appears as the chessboard of the gods, and mortals as insignificant pawns in their whimsical and cruel games: while a single man among the citizens of Troy was the cause of Hera's deadly rage and hatred, she has no qualms about destroying the innocent population of an entire city, since it is in her power to do so. Not even a request from her husband and lord can slacken her resolve.

Like Homer, Hesiod asserts that it is impossible to cheat or bypass Zeus' intentions,[24] especially when he is angered – as is exemplified by the story of Prometheus and his impetuous brother, Epimetheus. Although Prometheus was guilty of treachery against the gods, and Epimetheus was the instrumental cause of the calamities that befell mankind, the true architect of human misery was Zeus: his hurt pride prompted him to send Pandora to spread evils throughout the earth.[25] In the *Works and Days*, the poet repeatedly states that the will of the gods reigns supreme: in the opening lines, he unambiguously attributes to Zeus the power to rule over the fame and disgrace, happiness and distress of human beings;[26] lines 473–474 confirm that the farmer's harvest, and therefore livelihood, depends on Zeus' good or ill will,[27] and the sailor's ruin or salvation is ultimately in the hands of Zeus, Poseidon, and the rest of the gods, because 'with them rests the power over good and evil alike'.[28]

22 *Il.* I.8–12.

23 *Il.* XX.309–312.

24 ὣς οὐκ ἔστι Διὸς κλέψαι νόον οὐδὲ παρελθεῖν, *Theog.* 613; also *Op.* 105: 'Thus there is no way to escape the purpose of Zeus' – οὕτως οὔτι πη ἔστι Διὸς νόον ἐξαλέασθαι.

25 *Theog.* 567–570. A similar story is related in *Op.* 42–105. See *Op.* 49: '[Zeus] straightaway contrived mournful troubles against men' – ἄρ᾽ ἀνθρώποισιν ἐμήσατο κήδεα λυγρά, and *Op.* 57–58.

26 *Op.* 1–8, esp. 3–7: 'Through him are mortal men made both unknown and famous, both spoken of and unspoken alike, by the will of the great Zeus, etc.', ὅντε διὰ βροτοὶ ἄνδρες ὁμῶς ἄφατοί τε φατοί τε, ῥητοί τ᾽ ἄρρητοί τε Διὸς μεγάλοιο ἕκητι, κτλ.

27 See also *Op.* 638, where Zeus is described as the one who inflicts ignoble poverty upon men.

28 *Op.* 699: ἐν τοῖς γὰρ τέλος ἐστὶν ὁμῶς ἀγαθῶν τε κακῶν τε. McKirahan 2010, 13–17 provides useful, brief comments on the passages from *Works and Days* in which Hesiod exalts Zeus and the gods as guarantors of moral order, but also laments their partiality and readiness to inflict troubles and sufferings upon men.

Perhaps the most emblematic illustration of the idea that the responsibility for human suffering should be sought in divine will is Achilles' parable of the urns of Zeus.[29] After Hector's death, his father Priam enters the Achaean camp at night in a desperate attempt to recover the body of his son. Achilles is moved to pity on seeing the aged king and hearing his supplication. As he remembers his own sorrows and losses, he no longer sees in Priam an enemy, and endeavours to soothe his grief. He advises Priam to cease lamenting – for that will bring him no good – and blames the immortal gods for the terrible sufferings of men: 'for in this way the gods spun the destiny of wretched mortals, that they should live in sorrow'.[30] He then refers to the tale of Zeus' urns: there are two urns in Zeus' mansion, one filled with good, one filled with evil, and the god apportions to the mortals lots of happiness, misery, or a mixture of both, following his fancy rather than any discernible plan. Therefore, there is no point in protesting, there is no remedy for the ailments of life, since they are brought on the mortals by the supreme will of Zeus, to which even the rest of the gods bow in reverence. Achilles concludes his counsel to the broken-hearted king with a recommendation imbued with quietist ethos: 'endure and do not lament unabatingly';[31] incessant mourning will not bring his son back, but only generate further evils.

Plato in *Republic* II embarks on a quest to expose and invalidate the false idea that the gods are to be held responsible for the evils and sufferings of human beings. This mistaken idea spread by the early poets became firmly rooted in Greek society, in which the upbringing and education of children relied heavily on the stories of epic poetry. Plato chooses the parable of the two urns[32] as his prime example of 'that foolish blunder which Homer or any other poet commits in relation to the gods'.[33] Before examining Plato's argument, we shall turn to the context in which it is embedded, and offer some remarks on Plato's understanding of theology and of the divine.

29 *Il.* XXIV.518–551.

30 ὡς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι, ζώειν ἀχνυμένοις, *Il.* XXIV.525–526.

31 ἄνσχεο, μὴ δ' ἀλίαστον ὀδύρεο, *Il.* XXIV.549.

32 He summarises the story (with emendations) at 379d2–8.

33 οὔτε Ὁμήρου οὔτ› ἄλλου ποιητοῦ ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ἀνοήτως, *Resp.* 379c9–d1. This harsh censure does not imply that Plato, who may have written dithyrambs and elegiac couplets himself, despised poetry or intended to eliminate it. Burnyeat 1999, 255 writes: 'On the contrary, poetry – the right sort of poetry – will be a pervasive presence in the life of the society he describes. Yes, he did banish Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes – the greatest names of Greek literature. But not because they were poets. He banished them because they produced the wrong sort of poetry'.

1.2 Plato's Objections to Homer and Hesiod

Plato's investigation of the didactic strategies that will best promote the physical, psychological, and moral development of the citizens of the Kallipolis begins at *Republic* 376c. Through education cultural values are forged, and they in turn sustain the entire society.[34] In the *Republic*, Plato thoroughly reshapes the ethical and cultural standards of contemporary society so as to facilitate the intellectual and spiritual growth of its members. The main targets of this societal and educational reform are the young guardians, a few of which will grow up to become philosopher kings – a new breed of rulers intended to be conversant with the true values and *telos* of the ideal city.

Socrates, as he begins to explain his revolutionary ideas to Adeimantus and Glaucon, first proposes a conservative conception of education, and suggests that the long-established method of strengthening the body by gymnastics and ennobling the soul by music should be preserved. Of these two, music comes first. It includes λόγοι – literature or stories[35] – of dual character: true and false.[36] True λόγοι should be imparted before the false ones, and, as is clear from 377a4–7, this is the only – indeed very limited – aspect of musical education that precedes physical training, or gymnastics.

The stories in question are fables (μῦθοι), which, although mostly false, also contain a grain of truth.[37] Socrates' conservatism, however, ends here, and is followed by a *volte-face* in which he recommends a radical alteration of the

34 Burnyeat 1999 provides a very thorough and illuminating elucidation of the motives, nature, and projected outcomes of Plato's drastic modification of art and education.

35 Shorey 1937, 175, footnote e: 'μουσική is playing the lyre, music, poetry, letters, culture, philosophy, according to the context'. In its narrower sense, 'Plato's word μουσική covers music and poetry together, because in the ancient world you usually hear them together, as a song', Burnyeat 1999, 222. The essence of Plato's advice on what types of poetry and music should be allowed in the Kallipolis is found in *Resp.* 396e–397d and 399a–e, respectively.

36 λόγων δὲ διττὸν εἶδος, τὸ μὲν ἀληθές, ψεῦδος δ› ἕτερον, 376e11.

37 τοῦτο δέ που ὡς τὸ ὅλον εἰπεῖν ψεῦδος, ἔνι δὲ καὶ ἀληθῆ, 377a5–6. A curious assertion, perhaps, in light of 379a7–8: Socrates says that God should always be represented as he really is (οἷος τυγχάνει ὁ θεὸς ὤν, ἀεὶ δήπου ἀποδοτέον) – in other words, good. How is it, then, that the fables chosen to be taught to children are for the most part false? Shorey 1937, 175, footnote f, believes that the statement is no more than a literary device meant to attract attention. Adam 1902, 376e suggests that 'Plato's object in this preliminary discipline is to train the character rather than the intellect'. Plato wants his readers to be aware that μῦθοι in general are the product of imagination; this, however, does not mean that they are unable to convey important morals. The moral is the central and true aspect of any fable, and the real reason why it should be imparted to children. Plato himself will set a new standard of storytelling by narrating the closing myth of the *Republic*, the plot of which,

current curriculum, as well as strong censorship of the accepted educational materials. Since the fables told to children during their early years cannot but have a strong impact on their developing character,[38] Adeimantus wholeheartedly agrees with Socrates that their content should be supervised and, if necessary, censored.[39] As such, the great epic poems of Homer and Hesiod, and the legends related by other poets, would have to be thoroughly examined and revised.[40]

The rationale for this is that falsehood, especially when it is harmful, should not be taught to children. The myths of the popular religion are false and pernicious because they depict the gods as violent and resentful beings often plotting against each other, and against the humans who have fallen from their grace. This portrayal is highly unsuitable, and those stories should be seen as 'the greatest lie about the most important things', all the more since those who tell them do so 'in an ugly manner';[41] as such, they are most damaging to the souls of the young.[42] Therefore Socrates proposes new, reformed standards for understanding and depicting the gods and the afterlife.[43] These are Plato's own

albeit fictional, is devoid of the impurities pervading traditional myths, and delivers a very powerful and true message.

38 For the strong character-moulding impact of the ideas conveyed by the society's educators, see Bloom 1991, 351.

39 See 377b5–10.

40 See 377b–378e. However, Plato does not object to the use and reworking of the material presented in their epic poems. For his varied and masterful handling of Homeric and Hesiodic themes in the *Republic* to suit his own purposes, see O'Connor, 2007.

41 τὸ μέγιστον καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ψεῦδος ὁ εἰπὼν οὐ καλῶς ἐψεύσατο, 377e6–7.

42 Adam 1902, 377d: 'A distinction is drawn between a mere lie and a lie which is in itself οὐ καλόν, unbeautiful and immoral in tendency […]. Such legends not merely misrepresent gods, but also corrupt mankind'. The most significant example of such a lie for Plato is Hesiod's account of the dealings between Uranus and Cronos, and Cronos and Zeus. For the devastating effects of such stories on society see *Euthphr.* 5e–6a: the eponymous character refers to the story of Cronos' punishment by Zeus to justify his intention of indicting his own father.

43 'The reform of poetry is most immediately directed to Adeimantus and the teaching he drew from poetry in his speech in favour of injustice. On the basis of the 'reformed' poetry, Adeimantus could not have come to his conclusions', Bloom 1991, 351–352. This is not necessarily accurate. It is a fact that Glaucon and Adeimantus petition Socrates in the *Republic* II to persuade them that justice is worthier that injustice for its own sake, and independently of the possible advantages it may bring. It is also a fact that Adeimantus at 363a–367e gives negative examples from Homer and Hesiod that depict virtue as hardly achievable and the gods as corruptible (although most of the *Works and Days* can be interpreted as an invitation to mankind to change its evil ways and start honouring δίκη). And yet, Socrates' reformation of poetry is meant to be more widely applicable. Socrates strives to establish that the gods are omnibenevolent and free from falsehood, that death

τύποι περὶ θεολογίας, or patterns for theology.[44] At their core sits the intention to present the gods exactly as they are. The key difference between the reform initiated through these τύποι περὶ θεολογίας and Xenophanes' earlier and famous critique of the Olympian religion is that the former aims at establishing an improved and refined version of the existing religion, while the latter advocates an impersonal form of monotheism and on the whole dismisses the traditional Greek gods and religiosity.[45] This brings us to the issue of Plato's theological commitments in the *Republic* and beyond – as contrasted to those of Homer and Hesiod – which are going to be explored somewhat sketchily in the following section.

1.3 Some Principles of Plato's Theology

Unsurprisingly, Plato's critique of the popular religion of his day has nothing in common with Nietzsche's, or Feuerbach's and Marx's, condemnation of Judeo-Christianity and religion in general, respectively. Plato was a genuinely religious thinker,[46] and that fact does not need much elaboration or proof. The difficulty lies in understanding the intricacies of his religious views and determining the nature of the deities whose worship he recommends. Plato was not a polytheist in the Homeric, or, as one might put it, 'vulgar' sense of the word,[47] but neither was he a monotheist of the Abrahamic type. Who or what were, then, those gods whose nature Plato, in the *Republic*, wanted to convey to the population in general and to his guardians in particular? And did his

is not to be feared, etc., because this will help the young guardians imbibe the virtues of piety, courage, etc. Thus, Socrates' efforts have a much broader social and spiritual implications, and are not limited to the arguments related to the intrinsic superiority of justice over injustice.

44 *Resp.* 379a5–6. Bloom 1991, 56 translates as 'models for speech about the gods'; Shorey 1937, 183: 'patterns or norms of right speech about the gods'; Greene 1948, 294 and McPherran 2006, 89: 'outlines of theology'. 'Pattern' or 'model' seems a more accurate translation of τύπος in this case, because Plato's intention is to set norms or paradigms for any discourse related to theological issues (379a1–3), while 'outline' has a connotation of draft, sketch, or summary. See Greene 1948, 294 and McPherran 2006, 89.

45 See pp. 22-24 below. For Xenophanes' 'apostasy' and new theology, see McKirahan 2010, 59–63.

46 See Morgan 1992 about the claim that much of Plato's metaphysics and epistemology is derived from the ecstatic model of the mystery religions, purified of their emotional character through rigorous intellectualism and rational inquiry.

47 See Taylor 1938, 182–183: 'Where worship is given to a plurality of beings who are supposed to be independent of one another, and possibly hostile to one another, there is real fundamental polytheism'.

conception of the gods remain the same throughout his life, or do the deities of the *Republic* differ from those of the *Laws*, for example? These are, indeed, difficult questions, and this section will but outline an answer.

The complexity of the subject notwithstanding, one thing remains indubitable: Plato's gods are not the same as those described by Cephalus at the beginning of the *Republic*. Cephalus, a *bona fide* representative of conventional religiosity, believes that the gods favour those who worship them and are hostile to those who fail to do so. He rushes out to attend a sacrifice as soon as the philosophical debate turns to his deeply rooted but corrupt views on virtue and piety.[48] Still, the claim that 'there is no assurance that these [Plato's gods] are the Olympian gods or that they have anything in common with what Adeimantus understands a god to be',[49] is a step too far. Plato believed and repeatedly asserted that public worship of the Greek Pantheon's principal deities,[50] but also of the chthonic gods, heroes, δαίμονες and ancestral gods,[51] was beneficial to the polis.[52] He even approved of the newly introduced cults of minor deities.[53] This general mindset is reflected in the *Republic*. Through his reproach of Homer and Hesiod in *Republic* II and III, Plato makes it clear that his objections are not directed against Zeus, Hera, or the other gods, but against how they used to be portrayed.[54] The ritual and the gods of Kallipolis

48 Cephalus makes his brief appearance in *Resp.* 328b–331d.

49 Bloom 1991, 352.

50 See *Phdr.* 246d–247a, where the pure soul is said to abide close to the 'race of gods', consisting of the twelve Olympians with Zeus at their head, and an army of δαίμονες. *Phdr.* 252c–253c offers a shorter list of the Olympians. See also *Leg.* 828a–d: the sacrifices and festivals of the twelve gods, spread throughout the twelve months of the year by the Delphic oracles and the counsels of the city's priests, are prescribed by law. For the necessity of strict adherence to traditional oracles and to the established worships and religious practices, see 738b–d.

51 See *Leg.* 717a–b.

52 See *Tim.* 40d–41a: somewhat ironically, Plato states that the traditional gods have been introduced by 'the children of gods', whose accounts regarding their ancestry should not be distrusted, although they speak without likelihood and necessary demonstration (καίπερ ἄνευ τε εἰκότων καὶ ἀναγκαίων ἀποδείξεων λέγουσιν, 40e1–2). These are the mythical Orpheus, Musaeus, and the other sources of Hesiod's theogony. Although Plato here delivers covert criticism, he has no intention to discredit the faith in the traditional gods; rather, he warns against blind acceptance of every aspect of the poets' accounts.

53 See Socrates' enthusiasm to visit the festival of Bendis at the beginning of the *Republic*, and his famous last request in *Phaedo* 118a. These passages, however, also have allegorical meanings.

54 With Plato's broader theological revisions in mind, Mueller 1936, 462 writes: 'This reform is directed against the poets and artists, against the confusion of human, anthropomorphic stories and pictures with the deities themselves. Plato here stands in line with the Presocratic criticism of Heraclitus and the Eleatics; but it seems to me that his criticism is

will remain similar to those of fourth-century Athens.[55] Hence, the answer to the first question above, i.e., the question of the identity of Plato's gods in the *Republic*, is that they are the same as the traditional ones, but also different from them. The former, because Plato supports the 'state religion' and has no intention of introducing new divinities, i.e., of becoming 'a maker of gods', someone who 'creates new gods while not believing in the old ones'.[56] The latter, on account of the reformed theology that pertains to them. Plato's theological interventions are varied and significant, although many of them cannot be discerned from the *Republic*. The main doctrinal novelties introduced in the dialogue are related to the first two τύποι περὶ θεολογίας presented there.

Plato's first and crucial innovation is the affirmation that God is fundamentally good[57] and as such cannot be the source of anything other than goodness.[58] Second, God 'is both simple and least of all likely to depart from his form',[59] which is a terse statement of the principle of divine perfection. Plato draws two important consequences from it: a) God cannot change, since any change to the best possible state is necessarily one for the worse, and unacceptable in this context; b) gods may in no way be associated with falsehood and would not disguise themselves to deceive either one another or the mortals, for whatever reason.[60]

Subsequently, Plato's implicit precept is that the relation between deities and their worshippers should undergo a radical transformation. He presents the gods as epitomes not of unrestrained power, but of virtue.[61] They are just,[62] and cannot be tricked into assisting the unjust; their favour and affection is earned through striving for righteousness, rather than by offering sacrifices or doing penance. Worshippers and supplicants should not – and cannot – expect to earn potentially pernicious material boons by approaching the

less radical, because he loves the gods and their festivals and does not attempt to replace them by reason or by a naturalistic being-in-general'.

55 See McPherran 2006, 91.

56 See *Euthphr.* 3b1–4. This was, of course, one of the charges that brought death sentence upon Socrates. See *Ap*. 24b8–c1.

57 ἀγαθὸς ὅ γε θεὸς τῷ ὄντι, *Resp*. 379b1, an axiomatic truth for Plato. McPherran 2006, 98, footnote 7 deduces the gods' goodness from another of their intrinsic qualities, that is, perfect wisdom.

58 See *Resp*. 379a–c.

59 ἁπλοῦν τε εἶναι καὶ πάντων ἥκιστα τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἰδέας ἐκβαίνειν, *Resp*. 380d5–6.

60 See *Resp*. 380d–383c. Many myths offer examples of the gods disguising themselves, as a priestess, as a swan, etc.

61 In this aspect of theirs, they also appear as paradigms that are to be emulated by human lovers of virtue. See *Phdr*. 252c–253c; cf. Butler 2011, 82.

62 Δίκαιοι δέ γ' εἰσίν … οἱ θεοί, *Resp*. 352a10; see also *Tht*. 176b8–c1.

gods, but instead must hope to gain from them virtue and wisdom, thus reaping the highest blessing.

Such a relationship between gods and worshippers would require the citizens' conception of religiosity and theology to be profoundly altered. The first step towards this alteration is, as mentioned above, the strict censorship imposed on the most easily accessible aspect of religion – myths. The philosopher-king's subjects should hear stories of concord instead of quarrel,[63] 'wherefore [the wisemen], perhaps, must do [their] outmost to ensure that what [the young] hear first are the best tales about virtue a person can listen to'.[64] Plato offers examples of such beneficial myths in *Gorgias*, *Republic*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, etc.

The reform of religious practice, however, does not stop here. Plato considers it his duty to cleanse the sacred acts of worship of the foul meaning and purpose they have acquired through centuries of misuse. Although Adeimantus rightly points out that many people hope to expiate their wrongdoings by prayer and sacrifice,[65] this stance, according to Plato, is profoundly wrong: the gods may not be influenced by the prayers of the unjust, nor can they be bribed by their sacrifices.[66] Worship practices should nonetheless be carefully maintained, because they secure social harmony effectively and provide a good example to the young.[67] In fact, organised religion will assume a pivotal role in Plato's social system.[68] Through it, the non-philosophers – the majority of the population – are educated and led towards virtue.[69] However, there is even more to the concepts of worship and religious services; for, devotions to the gods are also supposed to be carried out by the enlightened class of the philosophers. In their case, acts of piety acquire much deeper purpose: for example,

63 See *Resp*. 378c–d.

64 *Resp*. 378e2–3.

65 See *Resp*. 364b–365a.

66 See *Leg.* 905d–907b.

67 See *Leg.* 887d–e.

68 This becomes very evident in the *Laws*. In the city of Magnesia 'a sacred acropolis is to be set aside as a central precinct for worship of Hestia, Zeus, and Athena (745d), and each of the city's twelve tribes, with its own festivals and temples, will occupy a plot dedicated to its particular god (738d; cf. 771c–d). The law courts, marriage, childrearing, and much else are to be conducted under divine auspices, and the polis has a full sacred calendar, filled with festivals, competitions, processions, and all their accoutrements', Morgan, 1992, 242. See also Morrow 1965, 123–126.

69 See McPherran 2006, 92. For a recommendation to the philosopher to develop close-to-devotional attitude towards the Forms, to imitate them, and to become like them as much as possible, see *Resp.* 500b8–d1.

an ideal prayer would become the petition for inner harmony of the soul and for abundance of wisdom, as is the one offered to Pan in *Phaedrus* 279b8–c3.[70]

As for sacrifices, festivals, and other forms of ritual adoration, they would assume the function of facilitating the practical application of one of Plato's most important motifs and injunctions: achieving ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, i.e., likeness to God as far as possible.[71] The *Phaedrus* and the *Laws* teach that the goal of life is to become a genuine follower of God;[72] however, only those who are dear to the gods may be accepted among their flock. In accordance with the ancient principle, 'like is dear to like',[73] dear to God are those who are, to a degree, like him: the pious philosopher focuses on striving for godlikeness by emulating God. His goal can be achieved through exclusive cultivation of wisdom and the practice of the purely rational art of dialectics, but also through religious adoration: 'Through worship a man recalls [the gods] to his mind and reinforces his sentiments of reverence; in worship he is actually assimilated, for a time at least, to the god whom he worships'.[74] Full dedication to philosophy may render the practitioner inapt for social interaction, as is the case with the eminent philosopher of the *Theaetetus* Digression.[75] This will not satisfy Plato the religio-social reformer; he needs men who are enlightened, but also sufficiently down-to-earth to be able to stand at the city's helm for everyone's benefit. Therefore, the identity of Plato's ideal guardian may be defined as not only a seer of the Forms, but also a well-rounded person and a religious zealot.[76]

With that said, we can now turn to the second question posed above, i.e., to the issue of the continuity, or unity, of Plato's notion of God. Recent studies

70 For some reasons behind this curious choice of an addressee, see Morrow 1965, 121–122.

71 *Tht*. 176b1–2. Cf. *Resp*. 613a7–b1, *Leg*. 716d1–2.

72 See *Phdr*. 243c–253c, *Leg*. 715e–716d.

73 τῷ μὲν ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον, *Leg*. 716c2. For the Homeric origin of this phrase and its full form, see Bury 1961, 294, footnote 1. It was first applied to the field of epistemology by Empedocles. See Guthrie 1969, 228–229.

74 Morrow 1965, 129.

75 See *Tht*. 172c–177c, 172c–e especially.

76 'Plato's Kallipolis, then, accommodates the virtue of piety and religious myth and ritual by harnessing them to its central project of producing rulers who will be 'as god-fearing and godlike as human beings can be' (383c4–5)', McPherran 2006, 92–93. The discussion regarding the appropriate content of the educational literature intended for schoolchildren, who are to become future guardians (*Resp*. 376e–392c), clearly indicates that they are supposed to grow into highly religious individuals. Their prominent role in the city's religious life is emphasised in *Laws* 828a–d. Various other passages of the *Laws*, book x in particular, reveal Plato's commitment to inspire strong religious sentiments in the general populace of a just city.

argue that Plato's theology lends itself to three modes of interpretation – metaphysical, cosmological and religious – which may need to be harmonised in order to unearth Plato's true understanding of θεός.[77] The metaphysical interpretation identifies Plato's deity with the Good, or, alternatively, with the intelligible Paradigm. These inferences are based on *Republic* 508a–509c, as well as on certain readings of the Timaean Demiurge, and are largely unitarian, in that they aim to provide consistency to Plato's metaphysics and theology throughout the middle and late period. The representatives of the cosmological approach decline to grant super-excellent status to the gods and see them instead as divine souls, mediators between the intelligible and the sensible realms, and subordinated to the metaphysical principles proper. This approach finds its sources in the *Timaeus* and *Laws* X. Finally, the religious interpretation – based on *Republic* II and III, as well as on numerous references to the traditional gods throughout the corpus – seeks to demonstrate that Plato's theology is isolated from his metaphysics, and meant to institute a superior form of religiosity in society.[78]

The obvious problem with each of these approaches is that they are mutually exclusive, i.e., they stipulate one-sided solutions to a multifaceted issue. Michael Bordt's[79] attempt to synthesise them may be considered defective as well, because it also seeks to provide a single answer to the question 'who or what is Plato's God?'. Yet, it is perhaps futile to expect to find a unified conception of theology in the works of Plato – an author who all but created the discipline, whose oeuvre spans over fifty years, and who deliberately seems to avoid formulating his doctrine in definitive terms. An inclusive approach would be more fruitful, one that takes in consideration the fact that Plato, as author, chose to adopt different stances to suit his intended goals – those of public educator, social and religious reformer, or philosopher proper – as well as the fact that Plato, as thinker, experienced several phases in his intellectual development.

77 This division originates with Bordt 2006; see also Bordt 2017 and Van Riel 2016, 61–64.

78 Van Riel 2016, 61–63, footnotes 2–4 provides a non-exhaustive bibliography encompassing proponents of all three interpretations. The author's own view falls under the second category, broadly conceived.

79 Despite the undisputable value of his contribution, Bordt's work contains questionable, sometimes unwarranted inferences, such as his claim that Plato's (supreme) God is identical with the Form of Good (2006, 134, 149, 162, *passim*) as well as with νοῦς (2006, 234–235, *passim*), or that the νοῦς of the *Timaeus* and *Laws* and the Good of the *Republic* are two aspects of a single entity (2006, 238–248). These stimulating and intricate issues of Platonic theology are beyond the scope of the present study, but cf. Ilievski 2022 about Plato's God as νοῦς (and not τἀγαθόν).

Hence, with the benefit of hindsight, one may suggest that in Plato's works are discernible the likenesses of the three approaches to religion later portrayed by Marcus Terentius Varro. Varro was a Roman polymath of the first century BCE, whose views on religion are described in detail in St. Augustine's *City of God* VI. 5–12. In these sections, St. Augustine suggests that worshipping the heathen gods for the sake of gaining eternal life is an ill-conceived idea, and discusses Varro's taxonomy and its three types of theology: mythical, natural and civil.[80] Varro himself considers mythical theology – encountered in epic poetry and in tragedy – as merely fictional and unbecoming of the gods' dignity and holiness, since it ascribes to the gods a mundane and impure origin, and a behaviour befitting mortals of the basest character. Natural theology emerges in the books of the philosophers, which explore a variety of issues such as the eternal nature of the gods, their material composition, or their presumed role as universal guardians. As for civil theology, it refers in Varro to an 'applied' form of theology, implemented in the cities by the priests, as they prescribe suitable methods for worshipping, and sacrificing to, each of the gods, and as they reveal what rewards may be expected from them in return. These three kinds of theology are appropriate for, and applicable to, the theatre, the world in general, and the city respectively. St. Augustine argues vehemently that there is no substantial difference between the first and the third type,[81] and that, subsequently, only natural theology rightly deserves its name.

As aforesaid, the implicit presence of this taxonomy can be observed in Plato's writings, and it may be of great use for understanding why the conceptions of the gods proposed by Plato the educator, Plato the lawgiver, and Plato the theoretical philosopher differ. In this regard, his concessions to mythical theology have been outlined above. Yes, Homeric religion must be thoroughly reformed, yes, all those depictions that represent the gods as 'human, all too human', and the heroes as lacking in ethical considerations should be discarded; nevertheless, the myth remains an indispensable educational tool. It acquaints the children with their cultural tradition, and, more importantly, teaches them virtue and piety. In order to compensate for the censored ones, Plato writes his own myths, and expects other benevolent and intelligent men to do the same.[82]

80 St. Augustine adds that the Greeks called these theologies mythical, physical, and political, while in Latin they may be called fabulous, natural, and civil: [*T*]*res theologias, quas Graeci dicunt mythicen physicen politicen, Latine autem dici possunt fabulosa naturalis ciuilis*, *De civ. D.* VI.12.

81 See *De civ. D.* VI.7–9.

82 For a very short discussion of Plato's usage of myth – in philosophy rather than in education – see pp. 45–47 below.

As was also described on the preceding pages, Plato kept the civil religion of regular worship and sacred rites very much alive as well. In the *Laws*, he set the foundations for an organised, institutionalised state-religion, the likes of which the Ancient world never actually saw. He prescribed regular ceremonies and rituals designed to develop piety in the citizens' hearts,[83] to give them the impression that they are already enjoying the favour of the gods, and to strengthen the sense of social bonding and unity[84] without which a prosperous society cannot be conceived. Now, do mythical and civil theology coincide in Plato, just like – according to Augustine's convincing argumentation – they used to concur in Varro? Perhaps not, because besides notable similarities, overwhelming differences are discernible among them as well: mythical theology is not compulsory, while civil theology is prescribed by law and its non-observance is punishable. Stories about the gods – as long as they are not pernicious – may be received and shared through personal authority and unexamined faith, while the official creed of the city is upheld by lawful decrees proposed as means of rational persuasion.[85] A few noteworthy mythical deities are not included in the rituals and acts of worships prescribed by the city – e.g., the goddess Necessity of the Myth of Er.[86]

Hence, both the mythical and civil aspects of religious life and theory emerge in Plato; they stem from an improved version of traditional religion and are intertwined, but still mutually distinguishable. Nevertheless, Plato's commitment to them does not belittle the superlative importance that he attaches to natural, rational, or philosophical theology – type of theology which he not only exercised, but also pioneered.[87] He was keenly aware that such an intellectual enterprise would only be appreciated by the most noble-minded individuals, and that the general population would be reluctant to accept it or to identify with it.[88] Still, it remains ever-present in the background of his project to educate and reform, as a corrective for mythical theology and as a firm foothold for civil theology. Before turning to Plato's theology proper, let us wind up this section with the hope that the above considerations demonstrate that Plato the author anticipated Varro's tripartite division of religion.

83 See *Leg*. 717a–b. Or perhaps to foster the virtue and piety already acquired in their childhood when they were exposed to proper tales about gods and heroes.

84 For these last two objectives see *Leg*. 771d. Religious events were spread throughout the calendar in order to keep ordinary citizens busy, and thus prevent overindulgence.

85 See pp. 21–22 above and pp. 156–157 below, respectively.

86 For which see p. 51 below.

87 See 5.1 below.

88 According to the Athenian in *Leg*. 890e, this is due to the complexity and lengthiness of the arguments in its favour. See also Mayhew 2008, 96.

Any discussion of his theology or of his understanding of the gods should take this into consideration.

The second item of Varro's taxonomy – that of natural theology[89] – is the true domain of Plato's exploits as a theoretical thinker, although it also forms an integral part of Plato the author's output, as outlined above. His understanding of the gods was diachronic: Plato's doctrine underwent a transformation during the transition from the middle to the late period. This shift of emphasis, as it may be described, stemmed from broader misgivings about the direction in which his metaphysics in general and causal theory in particular were heading. That is to say, while during the middle period Plato might had been at peace with the *Phaedo* theory of causation, he later probably developed increasing doubts with regard to the obscure notion of participation and the exclusive role of the Forms as explanatory factors. In response to these worries, he added to his existing scheme explanations from the causal potency of agent-like entities – like ψυχή and νοῦς – and thus opened an avenue for more elaborate theological speculations.[90] When all is said and done, this boils down to the following. In the early and middle dialogues Plato seemed to have deemed unnecessary to grant a noteworthy metaphysical importance to his gods. Their relevance was, instead, ethical – the gods were paragons of virtue and divine role-models for human conduct. Not much concerning their ontology, nature or cosmological functions was disclosed; Plato apparently operated with improved versions of the traditional gods – immortal anthropomorphic beings, fundamentally good and benevolent, as well as simple and immutable.

The late dialogues, however, paint a rather different picture. *Laws* X is generally accepted as the primary source for inquiries into Platonic rational theology[91] – on account of the carefully crafted arguments in favour of theism – but the *Politicus*, *Philebus*, *Sophist*, and especially the *Timaeus*, also offer valuable contributions.

One of the most prominent problem encountered by Platonists and critics is that the theological insights emerging from these dialogues seem disparate.

89 The contemporary definitions of natural theology usually set it apart from revealed theology, as having its bases in human reasoning and observation, instead of in scripture or tradition. Thus, 'Natural theology is the practice of philosophically reflecting on the existence and nature of God independent of real or apparent divine revelation of scripture', Taliaferro 2009, 1.

90 Ilievski 2022, 66–67 briefly considers Plato's transition from formal to efficient explanations (to use the Aristotelian parlance) and some of its consequences.

91 See, e.g., Gerson 1990, 33; McLendon 1959, 88. For the links between the theology of the *Laws,* the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*, see Schöpsdau 2011, 370–373.

In the *Laws*, the gods come into existence as immaterial souls,[92] while the *Timaeus* recognises a wide range of deities, such as the stars and planets,[93] the marginalised traditional gods,[94] the cosmos itself,[95] and, of course, the transcendent νοῦς that puts everything together – ὁ δημιουργός.[96] The creator-god of the *Sophist* and the *Politicus* is also a demiurgic entity,[97] and the αἴτιον of the *Philebus* is both νοῦς and craftsman-like.[98] So, is it possible to reconcile all these statements? Most probably, yes, and perhaps in the following manner. The *Timaeus, Sophist, Politicus* and *Philebus* refer to the same God, who is a productive cause and Intellect. This deity has become known as the Demiurge, the supreme God in Plato's late cosmology and theology. The Demiurge is a separate, un-ensouled νοῦς, and the ultimate generative and ruling principle of all souls and bodies, both universal and individual.[99] It is indubitable that this transcendent Intellect is the origin and the overseer of the ancillary gods and of the cosmic god of the *Timaeus*; and yet, even in the *Laws*, where the gods are portrayed as perfectly good souls, causes and controllers of all things,[100] there

92 See Gerson 1990, 73–76.

93 Described as gods visible and generated: θεῶν ὁρατῶν καὶ γεννητῶν, 40d4.

94 Both groups were created by the Demiurge: the stars are described as objects moving around the sky in a conspicuous manner, while the planets manifest themselves only as far as they are willing. See 41a3–5.

95 See 34a8–b1, where the cosmos is presented as the god that is about to come into existence, by contrast with the ever-existing God – i.e., the Demiurge; and 92c7, where it is called 'the perceptible god' (θεὸς αἰσθητός).

96 For a much more detailed discussion of the classes of divinities in the *Timaeus*, see Karfik 2004, 98–119. In the same work, 127–138, he interprets the Demiurge as non-different from the intelligible Paradigm.

97 See *Soph*. 264c4; *Plt*. 270a5, and especially 273b1–2: τοῦ δημιουργοῦ καὶ πατρὸς.

98 See *Phlb*. 28c1–31a3 and 27b1.

99 Ilievski 2022, 55–73 reaches this conclusion following an examination of contemporary interpretations of the Demiurge. It implies that the Demiurge cannot belong to a Platonic myth, that he may not be interpreted away as a metaphorical representation of an impersonal creative and ordering function (as argued by, e.g., Brisson 1998b, Johansen 2004). Neither should he be equated with the Good or with the Timaean Paradigm or with any kind of Form, nor with the World-Soul or its intellect. These deductions, if correct, also invalidate Bordt 2006, Butler 2011, Gerson 1990, 78–81, Van Riel 2016, 95–111, 117. They read Plato's god(s), respectively, as unity of νοῦς and the Good, instantiations of the Forms, ensouled noetic and productive activity, individual souls equipped with divine intellect. It is worth mentioning that, shortly before the final submission of this book's manuscript, Petrucci's Italian edition of the *Timaeus* was published. In its Introduction, Ferrari reads the Demiurge as an intelligible being separate from the world (2022, LI), but also identifies him with the Paradigm, i.e., 'con la totalità del mondo intelligible' (2022, LX), as he already did in Ferrari 2005, 23–24 and Ferrari 2007. Petrucci 2022, 265–266 seems to be overall in agreement with this interpretation.

100 See *Laws* 896c–e.

is strong evidence that those divine souls are generated by, and dependent on, a higher principle, which is again Intellect.[101] As for the visible deities identified with the stars and planets in the *Timaeus*, these correspond to the so-called astral gods of the *Laws*. Plato's astral gods are corporeal[102] and represent the indissoluble unity of soul and body effected by the Demiurge.[103] The *Timaeus* places the emphasis on their visible aspect, while the *Laws* places the focus on the soul that drives and directs them.[104] When all this is taken into account, a clear-cut henotheistic picture of the natural theology of mature Plato emerges. The transcendent, separate νοῦς occupies the royal throne in the philosopher's pantheon, leading towards perfection the sensible world that it fashioned out of pre-existing ingredients. The creation itself is 'full of gods'. These are the cosmos itself – a compound of universal body and World-Soul – and the astral gods. The latter are subordinated to the supreme deity, and entrusted with the task of administering cosmic affairs, which includes assigning to the individual souls the destinies that they have deserved. The traditional gods are relegated to the realm of mythical and civil religion, and play no part in Plato's philosophical theology, other than metaphorical.[105] As gods of the city, they are to be adored by one and all,[106] while the worship of the visible gods might also have been encouraged.[107] Intriguingly, the Intellect is not mentioned as an object of worship, not even for the philosopher; this may have been Plato's way to emphasise its transcendence and otherworldliness.

To summarise, in this somewhat lengthy digression two main question have been posed: a more particular one, related to the identity of the gods discussed in the *Republic*, and a broader one, concerned with the status and development of Plato's theology in general. The answer to the first question was that Plato in

101 For the soul as generated, and oldest of all things, see *Laws* 892a2–5, 892c3–4, 896c1–2, 892b1, 892c6, 896b2–3, 966d9–e2, 967d6–7. Νοῦς is the supreme controlling power in 966e3–4 (ἐγκρατὴς νοῦς ἐστιν τὸ πᾶν διακεκοσμηκώς), 967b5–6 and 967e1. For the priority of νοῦς over soul in both *Timaeus* and *Laws*, see Gerson 1990, 76. For a brief discussion of the relevant statements in *Laws* XII, see Menn 1995, 17–18.

102 See Broadie 2016.

103 See *Tim*. 41a7–b6.

104 Plato in *Laws* 898e–899a does not resolve the matter of the link between the astral gods' soul and body: the soul of the sun pushes it along its orbit by residing within it, by acquiring a separate material frame through which it controls this celestial body, or by being fully divorced from anything corporeal and in possession of unidentified, extraordinary power.

105 See, e.g., the mention of Zeus in *Phlb*. 30d1–4.

106 See p. 21 above.

107 See Schofield 2006, 313–314, and Timaeus' prayer for ἐπιστήμη addressed to the cosmic god in *Critias* 106a–b.

the *Republic* eulogises the 'improved' traditional gods, now disassociated from any moral failure encountered in mortals, and endowed with the attributes of omnibenevolence and infallibility. As for the second, an attempt was made to demonstrate that Plato implicitly adhered to the threefold division of theology into mythical, civil, and natural or philosophical, in accordance with the different messages he intended to send across. His writings from the early and middle period do not display strong signs of complex theological thought: Plato's philosophy of religion was then limited to his attempts at refining the existing concept of a god. At the same time, he was supporting the mythical and civil aspects of theology by composing and narrating myths about the gods, as well as by urging his readers to respect, obey and honour them. This remained a constant throughout his career, as Plato never disparaged common religiosity and ritual. In his late period, he also absorbed himself in theological speculations. They resulted in Plato's natural theology proper, which acknowledged what may be called a henotheistic system with pure Intellect as the supreme God, and categorically different ancillary gods, envisioned as immortal, perfectly rational souls equipped with material bodies. Both the Demiurge and the astral gods are proper objects of Plato's theodicy.

1.4 The Problem of Evil in *Republic* II

With this understanding of Platonic theology in mind, we may return to the discussion of Plato's thorough and ambitious reformatory work in books II and III of the *Republic*. Its extensive exposition is of lesser import for this study, which will focus instead on the rebuttal of the misconception claiming that God is the cause of both good and evil – an endeavour which falls under the first pattern for theology. As explained above, Plato believes that, since the gods cannot be vindictive, jealous or in any way malicious, the primary and most important τύπος περὶ θεολογίας is that they are benevolent: 'God is good in reality and should be declared so to be'.[108] At this point, Plato's Socrates begins to develop

108 ἀγαθὸς ὅ γε θεὸς τῷ ὄντι τε καὶ λεκτέον οὕτω, *Resp.* 379b1 (Shorey 1937, 182 adds: 'The γε implies that God is good *ex vi termini*' – i.e., by definition). As already mentioned, the second pattern for theology brought up in *Republic* II is that the gods are not susceptible to change or alteration and that they are free of falsehood or propensity to cheat (380d–383c). The third one, with which book III opens, is that Hades should not be presented as a dreadful place, nor death as the end of all dignified existence, lest it becomes difficult for the guardians to cultivate courage (386a–387c). The fourth pattern suggests that great men, heroes, and gods should not be represented as pitifully lamenting their inevitable losses, nor as acting in other unbecoming ways (387c–392a). The fifth pattern

an argument of essential importance for our cause. First, he argues that since God is good, he is by his very nature unable to do harmful or bad things. Thus, (a) nothing good is harmful (οὐδέν γε τῶν ἀγαθῶν βλαβερόν, 379b3); (b) that which is not harmful cannot do any harm (ὃ μὴ βλαβερὸν [οὐ] βλάπτει, 379b5); (c) and that which does no harm cannot produce anything evil (ὃ δὲ μὴ βλάπτει κακόν τι [οὐ] ποιεῖ, 379b7). Socrates, then, draws his interim conclusion: (d) that which in no way produces evil cannot be the cause of any evil.[109] Furthermore, (e) the good is beneficial (ὠφέλιμον τὸ ἀγαθόν, 379b11), and (f) the cause of well-being (αἴτιον ἄρα εὐπραγίας, 379b13). If this is true, from (d) and (f) follows the main conclusion: 'The good is the cause not of all things, but only of those that bring welfare, and it is not the cause of evil things' – οὐκ ἄρα πάντων γε αἴτιον τὸ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλὰ τῶν μὲν εὖ ἐχόντων αἴτιον, τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἀναίτιον, 379b15–16.[110]

This argument lends itself to at least one obvious objection: a good person may cause bad outcomes inadvertently – for example, by sharing food with somebody who might be, unbeknownst to both, allergic to it. In reply, one may urge that Socrates' implicit syllogism here[111] applies only to a special case – God – and that it contains a hidden premise which makes the reasoning valid. That would be the proposition 'God is omniscient', and therefore good to an absolute degree.[112] If the possibility of causing badness through ignorance is precluded, no other source of evildoing remains open to God. However, this solution does not answer a possible follow-up question. Let us say that a person accepts that a perfectly benevolent God stands in charge of the cosmic affairs. Would not such a deity still cause badness when it imposes suffering on an unwilling subject – even granted that this suffering is administered for the purpose of education and rectification only?[113]

states that poets must not relate stories in which unjust people are happy, and just people, wretched (392a–c).

109 Phrased as a rhetorical question: ὃ δέ γε μηδὲν κακὸν ποιεῖ οὐδ' ἄν τινος εἴη κακοῦ αἴτιον, 379b9. Vegetti 1998, 75, footnote 107, at this juncture refers the reader to the θεὸς ἀναίτιος of *Resp*. 617e5, which will be the subject matter of the next chapter.

110 For a clear delineation of the entire argument which aims to establish that the gods cannot be causes of evil (379b1–c2), and for a challenge to its first premise (All gods are [entirely] good beings), see McPherran 2006, 89.

111 The good cannot produce anything bad; God is good; therefore, God cannot be the cause of badness.

112 This is consistent with the famous Socratic tenet that no one errs knowingly. See, e.g., Socrates' suggestion that knowledge is a sufficient reason for avoiding any kind of moral failure, and Protagoras' ready acceptance of the same in *Prt.* 352c2–d2; see also 358b7–c3.

113 This condition must be allowed by anyone who accepts that the benevolent God interferes in human affairs, because the assumption that he would make living beings suffer just for pastime or to prove his point is hardly acceptable.

One way to elude this difficulty is to place the emphasis on the teleological dimension of suffering. This can be done in the following manner. First, by denying that purposeful suffering is evil. Indeed, less than a Stephanus page later Plato calls this strategy to his aid. Referring to the ghastly story of Niobe's punishment and other such tales, he writes: 'one must either desist from saying that these are deeds of God, or if they are [...] that God was performing righteous and good deeds, while those suffering punishment were reaping benefits'.[114] Plato undoubtedly considers remedial punishment to be beneficial (*Gorgias* 478a–480b, 505b–c), even more so when the punishment is administered by a divine being (*Grg.* 524e–525d). There it is said that the redeemable mortals learn a lesson from the punishment they receive, while the unredeemable become examples for the former. Another relevant illustration is provided in *Republic* 619d, where it is stated that those who receive punishment in the afterlife act less rashly and more wisely when choosing their next life.[115] The second phase in the exploration of the teleological dimension of suffering is to refuse to accept the existence of purposeless suffering. A decisive step in this direction is again made in the last book of the *Republic*: 'This, then, one must understand with regard to the just man, that whether he falls into poverty or disease or any other of the so-called evils, for him all these things will ultimately turn into something good, both in life and in death'.[116]

An attempt has been made here to demonstrate that the argument presented by Socrates is defensible even if God is considered as the source of something that may be perceived as badness, at least from a human perspective – such as the administration of reformatory justice. However, in the passage presently under scrutiny, Plato takes a different route and absolves God from any responsibility by relegating all badness to other source(s). This is a legitimate theodicean strategy, and yet the defence of the claim that only a non-good entity or event can be responsible for badness may present itself as a complex and challenging task. A rather vocal protest against the notion that only evil could cause evil is St. Thomas' famous dictum *bonum est causa mali*, clarified in his *Summa Theologiae*: '*esse causam non potest convenire nisi bono, quia nihil potest esse causa, nisi in quantum est ens; omne autem ens, in quantum huiusmodi,*

114 *Resp.* 380a7–b2.

115 Plato is certainly not the only thinker who believed that God does impose purposeful suffering, and that this is not in itself something evil. Shorey 1937, 184, n. *a*, quotes St. Thomas: *Deus est auctor mali quod est poena, non autem mali quod est culpa* – 'God is originator of evil as punishment, but not of evil as sin'.

116 *Resp.* 613a4–7.

bonum est'.[117] At this stage, however, Plato eschews the details and subtleties of this difficult issue, and concentrates on his thesis according to which divine beings are wholly benevolent, and thus incapable of generating evil.

Nonetheless, this does not preclude that Plato's tenet of 'good causes good only' is perfectly in keeping with his ruminations on causation, exemplified by the broader like-causes-like principle.[118] According to the latter, 'F things are F because of F', and 'No F thing is F because of un-F'.[119] *Phaedo* 100d7–8 offers a paradigmatic example of the first formula: everything beautiful is beautiful because of the Beautiful.[120] Thus, in light of Plato's causal theory, Socrates cannot be accused of inconsistency when he concludes:

> Then it seems, I said, that since God is good, he would not be responsible for everything, as the multitude claims,[121] but he would be responsible for a few things that pertain to humans, while free of responsibility for many other things. For, much fewer are the goods in our lives than the evils,[122] and while nobody else must be held responsible for the good things, for the bad ones some other causes must be sought, but not God.[123]

This assertion would be jarring for the ancient admirers of Homer and Hesiod, because it implies that, in their epic poems, the numerous accounts concerned with the gods' control over human happiness and distress – including the aforementioned parable of Zeus' urns – are plainly false. In a word, Plato's claim is that no god oversees the distribution of *both* good and bad.[124] Since

117 Quoted in Steel 1994, 258. A rough translation would go as follows: 'What is not good cannot be appropriately called a cause, because nothing can be a cause unless insofar as it is being; however, every being, insofar as it is such, is good'.

118 For its origins, see Guthrie 1969, 228–229; Sedley 1998, 116–117.

119 See Sedley, 1998, 114–132.

120 τῷ καλῷ πάντα τὰ καλὰ [γίγνεται] καλά.

121 Poets and dramatists, ancient and recent, are of course among οἱ πολλοι. Thus Aeschylus: 'Zeus, the all-effecting, the cause of all' (*Ag.* 1485).

122 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 984b33–985a2.

123 Οὐδ› ἄρα, ἦν δ› ἐγώ, ὁ θεός, ἐπειδὴ ἀγαθός, πάντων ἂν εἴη αἴτιος, ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν, ἀλλὰ ὀλίγων μὲν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις αἴτιος, πολλῶν δὲ ἀναίτιος· πολὺ γὰρ ἐλάττω τἀγαθὰ τῶν κακῶν ἡμῖν, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἀγαθῶν οὐδένα ἄλλον αἰτιατέον, τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἄλλ› ἄττα δεῖ ζητεῖν τὰ αἴτια, ἀλλ› οὐ τὸν θεόν, *Resp*. 379c2–7. See also Regali 2012, 129.

124 This conclusion could be a development of similar themes found in Plato's predecessors. For example, Democritus (DK 175) states: 'It is the gods who give to men all things good, both in times of old and now. However, as far as things evil and harmful and useless are concerned, the gods do not bestow those upon men, neither in times of old nor now, but they themselves run into these due to blindness of mind and lack of sense'. Unlike Plato in *Republic* II, he also identifies the cause behind the latter occurrences: '… but

the gods are in no way associated with badness, they can only cause, and be responsible for, the good things and events in this world.

However, the rebuttal of the thesis of a necessary causal correlation between good and bad states or events and the gods is not all there is to Socrates' words quoted above. As far as their further philosophico-theological import is concerned, they present four interesting and novel features. First, this passage probably contains the earliest recorded explicit assertion of divine omnibenevolence, a crucial step in Plato's reformatory work on theology. It has often been overlooked.[125] Starting with Plato up to the present day, God can be only that entity who is determined by his own nature and will to always do exclusively good things. Even though, since the advent of the modern process theologies, the properties of omniscience and omnipotence may be compromised without serious consequences, divine goodness must stand firm if the theistic approach to reality is to remain meaningful. Of course, the expression of faith that the gods are good and loving towards humans is very ancient, and a condition for the existence of any religion, but only in Plato that goodness becomes exclusive and programmatic. The unchallenged omnibenevolence of the gods is a key theological postulate for Plato, without which the gods cease to be worthy of respect and worship. For if a truly just human being should refrain from causing any harm or badness to both friend and foe,[126] all the more so should a god, who is conceived as wholly good, and as such incapable of causing badness. God now becomes a paradigm of virtue to emulate, and, exactly on that account, to venerate and worship.

Divine goodness in Plato also acquires a wider, cosmological significance – as it will be demonstrated in the *Timaeus*. The gods are rulers and governors of the world, of its various parts, and of the living entities. Above them all stands the Demiurge, as the highest principle of goodness and rationality. Besides not having the disposition to cause badness, he also actively wills the good,

they themselves run into these due to blindness of mind and lack of sense.' However, the authenticity of many of the utterances attributed to Democritus is difficult to establish with certainty.

125 For example, Greene 1948, 293 acknowledges the presence of this divine attribute only in Timaeus' description of the 'benevolent, outgoing character of the divine Demiurge'. Prior to this, he writes, 'The expurgation of the popular mythology, by Xenophanes, by Euripides, and by Plato himself, has removed from the gods a good deal of what was unsavoury, but has not suggested, by way of compensation, any positive content'. Indeed, Xenophanes, for example, merely states that 'Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods all the things which among men are shameful and blameworthy – theft and adultery and mutual deception' [DK B12]. It is therefore reasonable to ascribe the full formulation of this idea to Plato, although not in the *Timaeus*, but as early as in the *Republic*.

126 As argued by Socrates in *Resp*. 335a–d.

because evil springs from irrationality, and irrationality produces disorder. Disorder, on its part, breeds only chaos and degradation, through which the purpose of both creation and divinity is defeated.[127] God's omnibenevolence is, therefore, instrumental in upholding a righteous human society as well as the cosmic order.

The second innovative feature to emerge from the *Republic* 379c is the initial, rudimentary articulation of the problem of evil: '[t]he first distinct statement in Greek literature of the problem of evil, which hitherto has been only implicit'.[128] Of course, the problem of evil is fairly easy to express: If a good deity – or equally benevolent overarching providence – is in charge of the cosmos, how come there is in it badness of overwhelming quantity? This or any similar formula is not expressly visible in our passage. The truth is that the first *explicit* formulation of the problem of evil in Antiquity is due to Epicurus, if we are to trust the testimony of the Christian apologist Lactantius, recorded in his *De ira Dei*.[129] And yet this significant philosophical and theological development can justifiably be attributed to Plato: even though he does not explicitly articulate the problem, he develops its two main elements – the existence of a benevolent deity and the factuality of evil. Their juxtaposition, combined with the incentive to search for causes of evil that are different from God, is sufficient to automatically generate the paradox.

Consequently, the third innovative feature of the passage under discussion is that it contains the first clearly stated defence of God against the facts of evil. Plato is keenly aware of the badness spread through the marrow of our world and finds it incompatible with the existence of his deities. He asserts that goodness is an essential feature of God (ἀγαθὸς ὅ γε θεὸς τῷ ὄντι, 379b1), which precludes the inherence of its opposite in him. From this follows that, according to Plato's understanding of causation, God is incapable of producing any evil. He is causally related only to the good things that happen to us,

127 What we called here theological and cosmological import of divine goodness to a degree corresponds to Kamtekar's distinction between dispositional and rational explanation of why a god can be the cause of only good things, but never of bad ones. See Kamtekar 2019, 102–103.

128 Greene 1948, 298. On Plato's pioneering work on the problem of evil, see also Herman 1993, 19 and Hick 2010, 26, footnote 1.

129 'God, [Epicurus] says, either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God. If He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?' (tr. Fletcher 1871, 28).

and therefore remains causally unrelated to the evils that prevail in life and free from responsibility for them. That is another way of saying that Plato here attempts to absolve God from responsibility for the ills and tribulations experienced by humans. Thus, *Republic* 379c2–7 may justifiably be read as a *bona fide*, although rudimentary, theodicy – the first recorded in the history of Western thought.

The fourth and last remarkable feature of the passage is Plato's apparent recourse to dualism, in this case concerning evil and its sources.[130] He recognises two classes of entities, one defined by the property of possessing and causing goodness, the other, badness. The first explicitly includes gods and deities, while the second, for the time being, remains obscure, beyond the idea that 'of the evils some other causes should be sought, not God' (τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἄλλ› ἄττα δεῖ ζητεῖν τὰ αἴτια, ἀλλ› οὐ τὸν θεόν, 379c6–7). The use of αἴτιον in the plural (τὰ αἴτια) makes the opacity even deeper, and raises multiple questions as to what Plato had in mind while writing these lines. Does his statement imply plurality of causes of badness? Consequently, was his intention to find the multitude of individual souls responsible for the badness they experience, as it appears to be the case in the Myth of Er?[131] Was Proclus on the right track when he interpreted the passage as claiming that evils arise due to variety of deficiencies inherent in particular bodies and non-divine souls?[132] Should one take the verbal number used there as an indication that, e.g., Cherniss unveiled Plato's true intention by suggesting that his sources of evil are both soul(s) and Necessity?[133] Or perhaps Plato may simply not yet have determined to what cause(s) should the existence of evil in a universe governed by a good God be ascribed.

This is a difficult issue to resolve, especially so because the passage in question marks the first occurrence of this specific cluster of problems in the

130 Arguably, in his subsequent works, he adopts a more general type of dualism in relation to the created world, the so-called cosmic dualism (cf. pp. 38–39 below). For the notion of this kind of dualism, as contrasted with, perhaps, two-world dualism or substance dualism, see Armstrong 1992, 33–34.

131 It should be noted, however, that although Plato in the Myth of Er indeed relegates the responsibility for the individuals' tribulations to their own unwise choices, the Myth focuses mostly on the problem of moral evil and does not deal seriously with metaphysics of evil.

132 Proclus makes copious references to *Resp*. 379c and establishes it as one of the programmatic texts for and pillars of his own theodicy and theory of evil. The conclusion he draws from this passage is rather straightforward: evils do not stem from God, but from other, multiple sources, which are, however, not causes proper, but instead various levels of privation of goodness. See, e.g., *In Ti*. 1.375.20–26; *De mal.* 34.15–16, 41.13–14, 47. 17–18, 61.6–10.

133 See Cherniss 1954.

Platonic corpus. It should be kept in mind that a widely acknowledged virtue of Plato as a philosopher is his ability to confront similar questions at different times, to re-examine the answers he has offered, and to seek new ones. One may therefore infer that he gradually developed his views of the problem of evil, which matured and were refined through the successive stages of the *Republic*, *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus* and *Politicus*, and finally the *Laws*. Alternatively, Plato in *Republic* II may have only set the stage for a theory that he had already envisaged, but decided to elucidate in piecemeal fashion, or he may have chosen to employ a variety of ways to tackle the problem of evil as it was presenting itself in the dialogues.

Nonetheless, two things are made clear in *Republic* 379c2–7: (a) Plato obviously precludes the possibility that good gods can be causally connected to any occurrence of badness – which is the primary and most important pilar of any theodicy; (b) He postulates a factor or factors, operational in the world of humans, to which the responsibility for the existence of evil should be ascribed. It must be not only something or someone other than God, but also, at least to a degree, independent from him – if it were not so, the benevolent God would make it bring about beneficent things only, since all he does is good. Besides, this factor is to be held responsible for the greater part of the events in our world, because 'much fewer are the goods in our lives than the evils'.[134] This reflects Plato's healthy pessimistic attitude towards the world, the theodicean consequences of which will be discussed in chapter 3, dedicated to the *Theaetetus* Digression.

These considerations have the following implication. Usually, those responsible for states of affairs that obtain are also considered to be their causes – either contiguous (e.g., a soldier carrying out an order to burn down a house), or distant (e.g., his superior giving him that order). Thus, if God is not responsible for a set of events or states of affairs – in this case those characterised as bad, or evil – he is also not their cause. But since badness does exist, and since *nihil fit sine causa*,[135] some entity or power in our world must be producing it. This line of reasoning opens a route for the conclusion that Plato was indeed a kind of dualist, as it seems to be confirmed later, in his *Timaeus*,[136] but also

134 πολὺ γὰρ ἐλάττω τἀγαθὰ τῶν κακῶν ἡμῖν, *Resp*. 379c4–5.

135 In Plato's own words: 'for it is impossible for anything to come into existence without a cause': παντὶ γὰρ ἀδύνατον χωρὶς αἰτίου γένεσιν σχεῖν, *Tim*. 28a5–6.

136 Where νοῦς and ἀνάγκη unite in order to create the manifest cosmos (*Tim.* 48a). This is conditional upon the acceptance that νοῦς and ἀνάγκη in the *Timaeus* are indeed contrasted, or even opposed, principles, unlike what conclude, e.g., Archer-Hind 1988, 162; Broadie 2012, 183; Johansen 2004, 75; Sedley 2007, 113–127; Taylor 1928, 293.

by Aristotle's testimony.[137] As far as modern and contemporary critics are concerned, the dualism thesis is supported by Armstrong,[138] Burns,[139] and Hick,[140] while resolutely dismissed by Adam.[141] Steel[142] is also not in favour of it.

1.5 Does Plato Really Propose a Theodicy in *Republic* II?

This chapter so far has outlined the theological problem that Plato inherited from tradition, and his reaction to it. The former was the idea, commonly accepted by his contemporaries, that the gods were dispensers of both good and evil. This belief apparently endangers the notion of God that Plato tries to introduce and establish as the main pillar of his reformed theology, because it corrupts the property of divine omnibenevolence, i.e., presents God as the cause of evil, among else. Plato confronts and challenges this misapprehension in the *Republic*, in the context of the discussion of what is appropriate for the

137 See *Metaph*. 988a8–16, where Aristotle informs his readers that Plato made the One and the Dyad the respective causes of good and evil. Theophrastus followed Aristotle in his understanding of the basis of Platonic ontology, and wrote that, according to Plato (and the Pythagoreans), in the Dyad reside 'the infinite and the disordered and, in general, all shapelessness as such' (καὶ τὸ ἄπειρον καὶ τὸ ἄτακτον καὶ πᾶσα ὡς εἰπεῖν ἀμορφία καθ›αὐτήν, *Met*. 11b3–5). This would also mean that Proclus took Plato's meaning amiss when he used the above passage as the cornerstone of his own theory of evil. After all, Proclus is convinced that the evils have no proper existence and no regular cause, while Plato here explicitly says that for the badness that infests the world of humans some causes different from God should be sought.

138 See Armstrong 1992, 35–37.

139 See Burns 2020, 104–111. Burns 2020, 105–106 asserts that Plato admits a duality of causes, and that Middle Platonic dualism was influenced both by Plato's work and by Pythagorean sources. We are left to guess whether Plato's dualism was also of Pythagorean origins. For the idea of soft, or 'imperfect' dualism of principles in the *Timaeus*, see Fronterotta 2014, who holds that the opposed principles are the Model and the Receptacle. Nevertheless, their interaction and the subsequent coming to existence of the cosmos remains impossible without the intervention of a third, demiurgic entity.

140 See Hick 2010, 25–27.

141 In his note to 'some other causes must be sought' clause in *Republic* 379c5, Adam writes: 'The dualism should not be taken too seriously, in spite of the good and evil souls in *Laws* 896 E. Plato is not now constructing a philosophy, but casting moulds for theology and poetry'.

142 See Steel 1994, 251–252. He argues that (a) the passage deals only with evils performed and experienced by humans; (b) the cause of this type of evil is the soul's own wrong choice, as illustrated in the Myth of Er. This is correct, as far as it goes. However, Adam's and Steel's interpretations are flawed in that they are applied to Plato's philosophy in general, although their remarks and arguments for rejecting the dualism thesis pertain only to the *Republic*. They are hardly applicable to the *Theaetetus, Timaeus*, *Politicus*, or the *Laws*.

children of Kallipolis to learn and think about the gods (376e–383c). His strategy is rather simple and relies on the true and incontrovertible premise that God is essentially good. Combined to Plato's understanding of causation, this axiom leads to the conclusion that God cannot be the cause of anything bad, and that the sources of evil must therefore be distinct from him.

The above analysis proposes that the relevant passages from the *Republic* – 379c especially – lay the foundations for theodicy as a philosophical discipline. This is, however, a controversial assertion, since some scholars maintain that neither the *Republic*, nor any of Plato's dialogues, contains valid theodicy. Carlos Steel, for instance, in an otherwise very instructive article, states: 'After all, [Plato] was not primarily interested in the problem of theodicy (which first presented itself in Stoicism).'[143] In order to substantiate his claim, Steel next writes the following:

> For in this passage in the *Republic*, he is not concerned with the problem of evil in the universe as a whole, which is really the theodicy question, but with evil in 'human life,' that is, evil insofar as human beings experience it and suffer from it: the fact that we are not at all living well but are instead miserable and unhappy.[144]

Three main ideas constitute the framework of these quotations: (a) Plato, in general, was not deeply involved in speculations on theodicy (from the first one); (b) Plato was not concerned with theodicy in the passage of the *Republic* under consideration (from the second one); (c) Plato never presented a theodicy (from the bracketed clause of the first quotation). In what follows it will be argued that even if Plato's contribution to theodicy offered in the *Timaeus*, *Laws* X and elsewhere were neglected, and even if Steel's claims were examined on the basis on the specified passage from the *Republic* alone, claims (b) and (c) above would still be untenable.

Now, Steel is perhaps justified in claiming (a). It is true that, unlike St. Augustine or Leibniz, for example, Plato did not set as one of his main objectives to produce a comprehensive theodicy. This fact, however, does not imply neither that he was not concerned with theodicy in the relevant *Republic* passage (claim b)), nor that he produced no theodicy whatsoever (claim c)). The former seems to reflect Steel's assumption that since the passage only deals with a specific aspect of the problem of evil, it cannot be called a theodicy. This assumption is unusual. First, if one considers, as submitted above,

143 Steel 1994, 225.
144 Steel 1994, 225.

Republic 379c as the first explicit statement of the problem of evil and the first rudimentary theodicy in Western thought, it should hardly be surprising if Plato's considerations are not detailed, comprehensive, or systematic, given the novelty of the subject and his general style of exposition. Indeed, they were brought up as a supporting tool for a different overall goal that Plato wished to accomplish: the introduction of his educational and theological reform. He takes a short but significant pause from the main discussion to consider the problem of evil and theodicy, in the same way as he will address the existence of evil in the *Theaetetus* Digression. This could be intentional, because such brief, sometimes unexpected statements are liable to attract and capture the readers' attention.

Second, in Socrates's philosophical queries in general, as well as here, in the debate which he conducts as Plato's mouthpiece in *Republic* II and III, the focus lays primarily on ethical and political questions – preoccupations belonging to human beings rather than to animals or gods. As such, his philosophy concentrates on human matters, and it is not surprising if Plato, following his masters and adapting to the context, presents here the problem of evil from an anthropocentric point of view.

Third, and most important, contemplating the problem of evil from a human perspective need not be seen as imposing an unjustifiably limiting view on the issue. This approach accommodates, to a degree, the natural, or physical, aspect of the problem, as well as its moral aspect – suffering and moral depravity. What is left out is the pain that non-human animals experience – a sub-category of the physical aspect – and the metaphysical aspect of the problem. Animal suffering, however, is seldom a significant feature in theodicies, however refined.[145] As for the metaphysical issue, theodicists who ascribe all evil, including natural catastrophes, to soul,[146] perhaps need not postulate a separate metaphysical cause of evil, i.e., a separate basic fact or entity other than soul to which can be ascribed all other evils permeating the universe. In other words, to 'solve' the problem of evil, such a theodicy requires only a free agent whose will is independent from God.

145 This is the case in many Christian theodicies. Van Inwagen 2006, 9 classifies animal suffering as a 'different problem from the problem of human suffering'. That does not make the answers to either of them less- or non-theodicean. For St. Augustine's treatment of animal suffering, see Hick 2010, 85–87. For some contemporary answers to the problem of animal suffering and their ultimate insufficiency, see Francescotti 2013 and p. 182 below.

146 By relying on the Free Will Defence, as Alvin Plantinga does in 1974a, 54–64 and 1974b, 164–195. See p. 140 below.

Finally, the term 'theodicy' is usually applied in the broad sense of justification of God's ways in the face of evil.[147] Consequently, a theodicy concerned with defending God from the responsibility for human suffering and misdemeanour alone – which is a crucial component of the overall problem of evil – is a receivable theodicy. Why should the lack of concern for evil 'in the universe as a whole' disqualify it from being a theodicy at all? Any attempt to absolve God from responsibility for the bad things experienced and inflicted by humans is worthy of being called a theodicy; perhaps an incomplete one, but a theodicy nonetheless.[148]

These considerations, if they have any claim to plausibility, also invalidate Steel's assertion (c) – that Plato's work contains no theodicy, since the problem first presented itself in Stoicism. Although the bulk of Plato's theodicy occurs in the works that convey his mature views on natural theology – the *Timaeus* and *Laws* X primarily – the short passage of *Republic* II which has been analysed in this chapter does represent its starting point. Moreover, the dialogue has a further, highly significant theodicean contribution to offer. It is the object of the next chapter, which explores the last book of the *Republic*, in the final pages of which Plato set the controversial, sometimes neglected, but nevertheless influential Myth of Er.

1.6 Closing Remarks

The analyses conducted in this chapter should suffice to corroborate the claim that Plato's *Republic* marks the historical starting point for the philosophical interest in defending God's benevolence and wisdom in the face of the ubiquity of evil. As a genuinely theistic thinker, Plato was naturally eager to absolve God from responsibility for the calamities that sentient beings must endure. The short argument found in *Republic* 379c2–7 initiates his investigation of the problem of evil and of theodicy – that will motivate heated debates for centuries to come – and also represents the first recorded attempt to address these issues. Plato's theodicy is brief and rudimentary, and proceeds as an implicit deductive argument. The veracity of the propositions 'God exists' and 'God is good' is presumed, while the proposition 'the good can cause only things

147 In this study, theodicy – generally or in Plato – is taken in its plain and straightforward meaning: 'Defence of justice and righteousness of God in face of the fact of the evil', Hick 2010, 6.

148 Thus Tooley 2021, 7.5 acknowledges that lack of engagement with animal suffering renders a theodicy incomplete but does not disqualify it as a theodicy.

that are good' is defended in *Republic* 379b. The set of these three propositions, in conjunction with the undeniable 'there are evils in our lives', leads to the conclusion that God is not responsible for the bad things that human beings experience. The cause(s) of badness remain undisclosed, not even hinted at; inquiry into this aspect of the problem will be undertaken in *Republic* X and in the later dialogues.

CHAPTER 2

Theodicy in *Republic* x: the Myth of Er

The final book of Plato's *Republic* contains the second manifestation of his theodicy, almost concealed within the captivating tale of a warrior's wondrous exploits in the otherworld. This development, although conveyed most succinctly, is of tremendous philosophical and theological importance, because it contains the seed of what will become perhaps the most prominent theodicean strategy – the famous Free-Will Defence.

It is nowadays accepted that to attribute the notion of free will to Plato would be evidently anachronistic;[1] and yet, there are strong indications that he in the Myth of Er operates with something comparable. This is the act of choosing (αἵρεσις), or the faculty to make independent choices – which is essentially free. Plato transfers the blame for some of the badness encountered in the world to this very ability to make free choices, an ability available to all moral agents. God is therefore no longer accountable for badness. This chapter is thus dedicated to the theodicy of *Republic* x, or, more specifically, of its concluding myth, examined over four sections. The first one discusses at some length the structure and the content of the Myth of Er, since Plato's condensed theodicy can only be fully grasped against the background of the context in which it occurs. Section 2 introduces the crucial passages and identifies the explicit statement of the myth's theodicy. Section 3 concentrates on the theodicean implications to the lottery episode of the Myth of Er, an important corollary to Plato's vindication of God in *Republic* x. The last section explores the difficult issue of moral responsibility – the backbone of Plato's theodicy in the Myth of Er – as well as some associated problems, objections, and challenges.

1 See the highly authoritative analysis in Frede 2011, in which the notion is ultimately associated with the Stoics. Irwin 1992 and Kenny 1979 trace it back to Aristotle, while in the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century it was commonly assumed that Plato knew, and made use of, the notion of free will (see Cornford 1997 [1937], 147; Greene 1948, 306–307, Steward 1905, 169; Zeller 1888, 419–421). Nevertheless, there are also some contemporary critics who consider the concept of the will as more than an anachronism and believe that it can be accommodated within our accounts of Plato's psychology. See Segvic 2000, 3 and perhaps Sorabji 2004, 9 and notes 1, 3. For an overview and critique of the most prominent contemporary positions on the origin of the notion of free will in Antiquity, see Burns 2020, 223–226.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004679306_004

2.1 The Myth of Er: an Overview

Unsurprisingly, the word μῦθος conveys more than one meaning in Plato's works. Sometimes it is employed with its original meaning of 'anything delivered by word of mouth', 'word', 'speech', 'advice', both as embedded in quotations from earlier authors (most notably Homer)[2] and in Plato's own text.[3] At other times it refers to traditional fables in general,[4] or to one particular such fable.[5] It likewise designates tales composed by Plato and put into the mouth of Socrates and other dramatic characters.[6] In a more unusual sense, the word μῦθος is applied to Plato's cosmological account in the *Timaeus*,[7] or even to philosophical doctrines belonging to other thinkers.[8]

The eschatological tale of Er's post-mortem journey which will be inspected shortly belongs to the third category above. Plato refers to it as ἀπόλογος ('story', *Resp*. 614b2) and μῦθος (621b8), and it is a novel literary creation that also conveys deep philosophical meaning. Plato the mythmaker, however, did not only compose new myths, but also introduced a revised concept of μῦθος, as both distinct from, and associated with, the concept of λόγος. On the one hand, he is probably the first thinker to make a clear-cut distinction between the notions of λόγος and μῦθος[9] – the former being a discourse based on a process of reasoning, liable to refutation, and thus potentially falsifiable, while the latter a 'discourse […] that transmits unfalsifiable information and that gives rise not to

2 See, e.g., *Resp*. 389e5 (=*Il*. IV.412, Diomedes to Sthenelos): τέττα, σιωπῇ ἧσο, ἐμῷ δ' ἐπιπείθεο μύθῳ – 'Friend, remain quiet and be persuaded by my word'.

3 See, e.g., *Leg*. 790c3: τῶν περὶ τὰ σώματα μύθων – 'speeches concerning bodies'.

4 See, e.g., *Resp*. 376d9 (Socrates to Adeimantus): ἴθι οὖν, ὥσπερ ἐν μύθῳ μυθολογοῦντές – 'Come on then, as if we were relating a mythic tale'.

5 *Resp*. 377d5–6: οὗτοι γάρ που μύθους τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ψευδεῖς συντιθέντες ἔλεγόν τε καὶ λέγουσι – 'For they [Homer, Hesiod and other poets] were composing false tales, told them to people, and are still telling them'.

6 See, e.g., *Resp*. 621b8 (Socrates to Glaucon, referring to the Myth of Er): καὶ οὕτως, ὦ Γλαύκων, μῦθος ἐσώθη καὶ οὐκ ἀπώλετο – 'And thus Glaucon, the myth was saved and was not lost'; *Tim*. 22c7 (The Egyptian priest to Solon): τοῦτο μύθου μὲν σχῆμα ἔχον λέγεται – 'This [story] is said to have the form of a myth'.

7 The famous εἰκός μῦθος (*Tim*. 29d2, 59c6, 68d2, etc.).

8 Such as the Heracliteans, or Protagoras. *Theaetetus* 156c3–4 mentions a doctrine attributed to both, as well as to Homer and to 'every philosopher except Parmenides': τί δὴ οὖν ἡμῖν βούλεται οὗτος ὁ μῦθος, ὦ Θεαίτητε, πρὸς τὰ πρότερα; – 'Then, what does this myth mean to us, Theaetetus, in relation to what was said before?'. For a more elaborate analysis of the use of μῦθος in Plato, see Partenie 2009, 1–5.

9 'The famous μῦθος/λόγος dichotomy is not clearly attested prior to Plato, although the germs may be discerned in some authors', Naddaf 1998, x.

certainty but to a belief, which nonetheless may be particularly strong'.[10] Such a distinction is drawn in the *Protagoras*, when the eponymous speaker, after interpreting the myth of Prometheus as to suit his purposes, decides to address the more subtle points by leaving behind the mythical narrative (μῦθος) and resorting to reasoned argument (λόγος) instead.[11] On the other hand, sometimes in the dialogues 'the two terms are used without a strong contrast.'[12]

Plato's purpose for first drawing, and then occasionally blurring, the distinction between μῦθος and λόγος may lie in his intention to give myth a fresh identity in order to integrate it into philosophy: new, Platonic myths are intended to play a role in the education of the young, and to serve as an instrument of persuasion among adult citizens, who, for the most part, do not practise philosophy.[13] Unlike their traditional counterparts which are mostly false and contain only a grain of truth, Plato's reformed myths are never deceptive. Although they often are fanciful and should not be taken at face value,[14] they always convey a pure and true message.[15] As such, Plato's myths are not incompatible with his λόγος, and this allows him to introduce the closing tale of the *Gorgias* with the following words: 'Listen now, he said, to a very fine speech, which you will, I think, consider a tale (μῦθον), while I consider it a rational account (λόγον). For what I will tell you, I will tell as being true (ὡς ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέξω)'.[16]

It is important here to remember that Plato was not only a theoretical philosopher, but also a religious-*cum*-social reformer and a literary author. He is aware that tales of gods and heroes, so deeply ingrained in the mental setup of his contemporaries, will render his works more accessible to his audience, because ordinary men may easily appropriate, and identify with, such stories. This pleasurable 'sugar-coating' of the often bitter or simply difficult nature of Plato's teachings made them much easier to embrace, even for those less philosophically inclined. Plato's eagerness to improve the human condition,

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10 Brisson 1998a, 10–11.

11 τούτου δὴ πέρι, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκέτι μῦθόν σοι ἐρῶ ἀλλὰ λόγον, *Prt.* 324d6–7.

12 Partenie 2009, 5. Thus, Timaeus' cosmological account is seemingly frivolously labelled both as εἰκός μῦθος and εἰκός λόγος.

13 Cf. Collobert *et al.* 2012, 1–2.

14 See, e.g., *Phd.* 114d1–2.

15 Brisson 1998a, 109 offers a similar analysis of this ambiguity: '[The] explanation can be found in a change of perspective. Truth and error no longer reside in the correspondence of a discourse with the referent to which it is supposed to refer, but in the agreement of a discourse – in the present case, myth – with another discourse raised to the level of a norm'.

16 *Grg.* 523a1–3.

combined with his artistic talent, results in this 'marvellous instrument of persuasion: myth'.[17] Through its appeal to emotions, myths solicit the appetitive part of the soul, which, in the majority of the population, holds sway over the rational one. An enlightened philosopher is not only very well versed in the topics he or she expounds, but also understands the distinct natures of his or her audience' souls, and is able to touch each one of them through skilful use of language, either to teach (πρὸς τὸ διδάξαι) or to persuade (πρὸς τὸ πεῖσαι).[18] Thus, it perhaps would not be wrong to presume that the Platonic myth, conceived of as a non-factual but essentially truthful tale, has two main functions. First, to instruct non-philosophers in abstract matters by providing images and examples.[19] Individuals with profound aspirations, however, are not excluded from its purview, for, through the appetitive part of their soul, they also profit from examining images and experimenting with different cognitive practices. Second, to persuade a person to adopt beneficial beliefs.[20]

The above cursory remarks were meant to pave the way for and ease the access to the concluding myth of the *Republic*, which will be examined in some detail on the pages that follow. The myth's relevance for the purpose of this study rests first and foremost on its obviously theodicean passages directed against the archaic intuition that the deity is responsible for the badness experienced by human beings, although it also deserves attention on account of its broader philosophical implications, and literary excellence.

The Myth of Er has been leading the commentators to a variety of conclusions, and has given rise to disparate feelings among them – ranging from deep admiration to strong depreciation. Stewart 1905, 132 introduces his discussion of the myth as follows: 'We come now to the Myth of Er (*Rep.* 614Aff.), the greatest of Plato's Eschatological Myths, whether the fullness of its matter or the splendour of its form be considered'. This stands in stark contrast to Annas 1981, 349, who perceives the myth as 'a painful shock'; she is dumbfounded by its 'childishness' and its 'vulgarity [which] seems to pull us right down to the level of Cephalus, where you take justice seriously only when you start thinking about hell-fire'.[21] Still, most scholars who scrutinise the

17 Brisson 1998a, 11.

18 See *Phdr*. 277b–c.

19 See Partenie 2009, 8–10.

20 See the 'noble lie' of *Republic* 414b–c, also *Resp*. 621b, *Phd*. 114d2–6. See also Partenie 2004, XVIII.

21 She takes a more positive view on the myth in Annas 1982. Her interpretation of the myth also changes, almost radically, from 1981 to 1982. While the 1981 interpretation considers that the myth, unless thoroughly demythologised, 'offer[s] us an entirely consequentialist reason for being just' (1981, 349), in 1982 she sees it as fitting, albeit awkwardly, in the

closing pages of the *Republic* remain more moderate and balanced in their judgment of the myth's philosophical value, emphasising both its merits, and the seemingly insoluble difficulties that it poses.

The Myth of Er, probably the most puzzling of Plato's four great eschatological myths,[22] begins after Socrates has described to Glaucon some of the earthly advantages rightly enjoyed by a just person, and its purpose is to depict the much greater, albeit unobservable, rewards that await them in the afterlife. In the myth, the reader is introduced to a brave soldier named Er, son of Armenius of Pamphylia,[23] who lost his life in unspecified war. Er's lifeless body, unaffected by decomposition, had been lying on the battlefield for ten days, before it was retrieved by his relatives, and placed on a funeral pyre. On the twelfth day he was miraculously restored to life, and immediately began to relate to the mourners the astonishing account of his experience in the netherworld and beyond. This wonderful report consists of four parts – with two illuminating comments interjected in the third one – and a closing piece of advice which winds up not only Er's tale, but also the dialogue as a whole.[24]

Scene one (614c–616b): Upon leaving his body, Er's soul joins a company of other souls and travels to the mysterious place where the departed are judged.

Republic's main moral argument, and, despite its immediate context, as excluding the consequentialist reasons for being just, unlike the myths of the *Gorgias* and *Phaedo* (see Annas 1982, 137). Johnson 1999 offers a plausible critique of Annas' views, and suggests that the Myth of Er not only perfectly fits with the overall argument of the *Republic*, but even enhances it. Ferrari 2009 is another highly recommendable interpretation of the myth and of its place in the dialogue.

22 The other three being those related in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*. The eschatological account of the *Laws* x lacks most of the scenery and picturesqueness of both traditional and Platonic myths and should be studied separately.

23 An ancient coastal area of southern Asia Minor, inhabited by a mixture of tribes (πᾶν-φυλή), including Greek colonists. Therefrom the name Pamphylia. Vegetti 2007, 75, footnote 97 explains that the main character's name, Er, is not of Greek origin, but may belong to the Hebrew or Zoroastrian tradition, while Adam 1902, 614B cites several fanciful ancient opinions on his identity. Platt 1911 suggests that Ἠρὸς τοῦ Ἀρμενίου means 'Er, the Armenian', and that the epithet 'Pamphylian' is used playfully. He believes to have identified both the historical person behind Plato's character, and the exact battle in which he was killed. Plutarch amends the name of Er's father to Harmonius and interprets the appellations as a '[r]idling allusion to the fact that the souls are born by a union of parts (ἁρμονία) and are fitted (συναρμόττονται) to their bodies, on getting release from which they collect from all quarters in the air (ἀήρ), whence they betake themselves again to their second births' (*Quaest. conv.* 740B–C, tr. Sandbach 1961, 245).

24 Johnson 1999, 7–10 also discerns four scenes and a final speech, corresponding roughly to those delineated here. Halliwell recognises only three sections – merging the third and fourth scenes – which successively convey 'the three great ideas of eschatological judgment, cosmological necessity, and reincarnation or metempsychosis', Halliwell 2007, 536.

There, he beholds two openings in the earth and two openings in the sky, in and out of which souls enter and exit. Judges are seated between these two pairs of openings, and assign their paths to the damned and the blessed. Er receives the instruction to observe carefully everything that happens 'at that place',[25] and to act as a messenger to mankind.[26] Instead of following other souls on the downward or upward path,[27] he remains in the meadow among the souls who have completed their journey – both those coming from one of the openings leading to Tartarus, and those coming from one of the openings in Heaven. As he listens to their conversations, he learns that each soul was either suffering punishment for its misdeeds, or enjoying the rewards of a virtuous life, over the equivalent of ten lifetimes – a thousand years.[28] He also learns that some, among those who endured punishment, are incurably

25 614d2 – ἐκεῖ. Shorey 1937, 494, footnote *b*, translate as 'the other world', and supports his choice with references from the *Republic* and other dialogues. The scenery and events of the myth are undoubtedly otherworldly. Adam 1902, 614c proposes a location for the τόπος δαιμόνιος to which Er travels, which is the same as the meadow (ὁ λειμών) of judgment, somewhere on the *Phaedo*'s real earth (ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς γῆ), 'as opposed to the misty hollows where we live'. Stewart 1905, 166–170 has the entire voyage of the souls, after they are assembled at the meadow, take place somewhere on the surface of planet Earth as we know it.

26 Baracchi sees in the character of Er an allegory of the Socrates of the *Republic* and of philosophers in general, whose role includes acting as messengers for the rest of humanity, 'hovering between worlds and weaving them together in their irreducibility' (2002, 180).

27 Adam 1902, 614c, Morrison 1955, 66 and Halliwell 2007, 451–452 express little doubt that the route ἄνω διὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ leads to the top of the vault of heaven, where the just souls join the procession of the gods and contemplate the Forms. It seems implausible that Plato should allude here to *Phaedrus* 247b, since a soul returning from a place of such beatific vision would not be likely *immediately* to make the worst choice possible, as was the case with the one who, *prompted by folly and greediness*, rashly chose the life of a lowly tyrant. Folly and greed are much more likely to stem from indulgence in sensual pleasures somehow transposed to the heavenly realm, than from the even imperfect contemplation of the Forms. For a straightforward denial of the possibility that an un-enlightened (non-philosopher) soul may join the gods, see *Phd.* 82b; *Phdr.* 248e–249b explicitly mentions a process of judgment, a correctional place under the earth, and a heavenly realm of rewards – clearly distinct from 'the top of the heaven'.

28 Shorey 1937, 495, footnote *i* remarks that one hundred years is the ideal life span for Hindus (see, e.g., *Bhāgavata Purāna* IV.25.43). Solon (*fr.* 27), followed by Herodotus (*Hdt.* I.32), sets the limit of human life to seventy years, and Vegetti 2007, 77, footnote 101 also notes that a lifespan of one hundred years is unusual in the Greek tradition. There is no indication that Plato was borrowing directly from Hinduism; Adam 1902, 615a–b is probably right in claiming that Plato choose the hundred-year life span under Pythagorean influence.

wicked souls who will never be allowed to leave the underworld,[29] and hears a brief description of the torments awaiting the unjust in Tartarus. This marks the end of the first part of Er's story. It seemingly justifies the worries expressed in Annas 1981, because here a thoroughly consequentialist reason for being just is given. In this section, the myth shows that the just receive tenfold reward for their goodness, and the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the wicked; therefore, it is much more prudent to be just than to be unjust. And yet, the subsequent parts of the story will not support this simplistic view, which flies in the face of the *Republic*'s overall argument. Indeed, 612c–613b prefigure the purpose of scene 1: its role is to illustrate the second part of the claim that God does not neglect the just, either in life or in death. This does not imply that Plato in any way encourages the pursuit of justice only for the sake of the benefits it delivers.

Scene two (616b–617d): After spending seven days in the meadow, the assembled souls rise and, at the end of a five-day journey, reach a wonderful pillar-like beam of light, originating from heaven and piercing the earth.[30] The rainbow-coloured pillar itself contains an even more wonderful sight: in it, the ends of the light-chain that girdles the heaven meet, and from that junction is suspended a spindle, called the spindle of Necessity. Its hook and shaft are made of adamant, and its hollow whorl contains seven other whorls,[31] forged out of an alloy of adamant and other materials. The rims of all but the second

29 Cf. *Phd.* 113e, *Grg.* 525c–e. In the *Gorgias* and here in the *Republic*, Socrates ascribes this dreadful fate mostly, but not exclusively, to tyrants and kings. There are other resemblances between the concluding myths of these two dialogues, but also some major differences, the most prominent of which is that the afterlife depicted in the *Gorgias* myth somewhat resembles what will become the Christian concept of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. For a comparative study of the judgment myths in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, see Annas 1982.

30 For a discussion of the nature, shape, and function of the central light in the Myth of Er, see Richardson 1926 (who relies strongly on Adam 1902) and Morrison 1955. They reach different conclusions, even though they both consider the Pythagorean doctrine of central fire and some aspects of Parmenides' 'Way of Opinion' as possible sources of the concept.

31 They represent, starting from the outermost whorl, the orbits of the fixed stars, the five planets known to Plato, the sun, and the moon. See Vegetti 2007, 79, footnote 106. Halliwell 2007, 456 writes: 'The methodically itemised list of the spindle's immediate properties – the order and size of its rims, their varying luminosity – makes it coherently intelligible as a mathematical model of celestial bodies in a spherical, geocentric cosmos'. The whorl of the fixed stars revolves from east to west, while the seven inner whorls revolve in the opposite direction. This recalls the motions of Timaeus' circles of the Same and the Different.

and the fifth whorl are of different colours,[32] and each one of them has a Siren mounted on it, each of whom produces a single note, which blends with the others into a beautiful melody.[33]

At this point of the narrative, the goddess Necessity herself is introduced. That figure may be reminiscent of Parmenides' goddess Ἀναγκη (DK B10 and 12), who steers the universe from her position in the centre of it. She is certainly not a 'personification of the concept of 'necessity' in *Timaeus* 68e ff';[34] on the contrary, the goddess seems to be an embodiment of the providential governance of the cosmos, which is unalterable, but also essentially rational and teleological. The following statement is probably meant to convey a similar idea: 'Throughout the *Republic* … Plato has used the word *necessity* in a logical rather than deterministic sense. Things are the way they are because they *must* be that way in the rational order'.[35] Upon the lap of the goddess Necessity revolves the aforementioned cosmic spindle. It is propelled by the hands of her three daughters, the Moirai: Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos.

Hesiod's *Theogony* 211–222 presents a dreadful picture of the Moirai: they are daughters of Night, ruthless castigators who virulently pursue the transgressor among both gods and men; their fury does not abate until they have mercilessly punished the sinner. However, lines 901–905 of the *Theogony* provide a more concise and utterly different depiction of the Moirai: daughters of Zeus and Themis, entrusted with the duty to apportion good and evil and to preside over the fates of men. Traditionally, Lachesis was charged with assigning happiness, misery, and duration of life to mortals (from λάχος, lot, allotted portion), and with measuring out the thread of life. This thread of life was spun by Clotho (from κλώθω – I spin), and eventually cut by Atropos, she 'who cannot be turned away' (ἄτροπος – unalterable, unturned). Plato's Moirai bear the same names as Hesiod's, and, following the ancient tradition, preside over the past, present, and future, respectively. In the Myth of Er, however, they are the daughters of Necessity, and each of them performs an additional duty: Lachesis assigns the guardian δαίμων to the souls as they are born, Clotho confirms the choice and fate of the soul, and Atropos makes it irreversible. Plato

32 Possibly the seventh and the eight (i.e., the sun and the moon) are of the same colour as well, since the latter reflects the light of the former. For a concise, but complex interpretation of the principle of order and the functions of the rims' colours, as associated with the physical composition of the whorls, see Braumbaugh 1951.

33 The Pythagorean 'harmony of the spheres'. For Aristotle's statement and critique of the theory, see *Cael.* 290b12–291a25.

34 Braumbaugh 1951, 173. For the difference between the Necessity of the *Republic*, and that of the *Timaeus* and *Laws*, see Vegetti 2007, 80, footnote 109.

35 Johnson 1999, 8. Cf. Halliwell 2007, 457.

portrays the Moirai seated around their mother's throne and singing with the Sirens of things that were, are, and will be.

The geography and cosmography of this section consist of a curious blend of Plato's own ideas and 'traditional-cum-Homeric mythology (including the Sirens and Lachesis), mathematical astronomy, Pythagorean motifs (the harmony of the spheres), and the esotericism of Bacchic-Orphic mystery religion (as affinities with funerary gold lamellae confirm)'.[36] Like scene 1, scene 2 generates numerous interpretative problems that are beyond the scope of this study. And yet, although it is generally true that a Platonic myth '*should* have some rational interpretation',[37] the fact remains that Plato is purposefully disguising his message as a tale; this renders plausible images that might not be so outside the context of a tale, such as the notion of a disembodied soul wearing a tablet on its chest, or travelling on foot, etc. Nevertheless, Plato's purpose for the second scene's complex earthly and celestial imagery is clear: it conveys the innate orderliness and rationality of the cosmos, from which stem its goodness and fairness. Before they are reborn in mortal bodies, the souls are given a chance to contemplate the orderly nature of the cosmos; if they are able, they may retain and cherish this vision during their embodied existence. This image is echoed in *Timaeus* 41e.

Scene three (617d–621a): As soon as the souls arrive at the beam of light, they are invited to approach Lachesis and gather around her throne. A prophet[38] of the goddess takes from Lachesis' lap lots and patterns of life, and ascends a raised platform to address, on behalf of his mistress, the assembly of souls, whom he describes as ephemeral.[39] From him, the souls learn that they are about to embark on another course of earthly life; their δαίμων will not be assigned to them, but they must choose it themselves; they will pick (αἵρεσθαι, 617e1)[40]

36 Halliwell 2007, 457–458.

37 Annas 1982, 120.

38 This figure remains mysterious. McPherran 2010, 138 suggests reasons behind its inclusion in the myth by Plato.

39 ψυχαὶ ἐφήμεροι, souls living for a day (617d6–7). Thayer 1988, 376–378 alleges that, through this phrase, Plato introduces surreptitiously the idea that his promotion of the concept of immortality has been all along but a dramatic fiction. This interpretation contradicts much of Plato' writings, and receives no textual support, except maybe indirectly from some early dialogues (see, e.g., *Ap.* 40c–e). Rather, Plato uses the adjective ἐφήμεροι figuratively, to highlight the detrimental consequences arising from the soul's connection to the body. In and of itself, the soul is immortal: ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται οὖσα, *Phd.* 114d4; ψυχὴ πᾶσα ἀθάνατος, *Phdr.* 245c5, etc.

40 Shorey 1937, 507, footnote *c*, referring to Zeller and Nestle, submits that this is an intentional correction of *Phaedo* 107d, where the δαίμων is said to be allotted to the soul – in keeping with the traditional view (see Adam 1902, 617d, and Greene 1948, 421, App. 52). The

a life from an assortment of life-patterns; they will cast lots to determine the order in which they will do so;[41] the choice of an appropriate life will be made at their own discretion, and their decision, once made, will be irreversible, although they will always remain free to practise virtue, should they wish to do so. The responsibility for the ensuing happiness or misery will lay solely with them; God remains blameless.[42]

The lots are cast, and each soul seizes the closest one – except for Er, who is forbidden to do so. The prophet spreads before the assembly the patterns of lives, far more numerous than the souls present there. These lives are to be lived in a wide variety of human and animal forms, and contain an abundance of potential happiness and misery, as well as intermediate states. Only the quality or order of the soul (ψυχῆς δὲ τάξιν, 618b2–3) remains undisclosed; it will be determined by necessity according to the features of the chosen life-pattern. The prophet also notifies the assembly of souls not to be disheartened if the will of τύχη relegates them to the end of the line: even the last one to choose, provided it chooses wisely, will earn at least a good enough life, and not an evil one.

Despite the warnings of the prophet, many souls make hasty and foolish choices: the soul who drew the first lot instantly seizes the life of a powerful tyrant, unable to foresee that it will lead him to abominable and horribly self-destructive acts.[43] Upon realising this, he wails loudly, beats his breast, and ascribes his ordeal to the workings of fate, to the gods – to anything but his own choice.[44] Other souls after him approach the life-patterns lying on the ground

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δαίμων here is nothing other than men's fate, which is of their own making (cf. Heraclitus' maxim: ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων, DK B119). See also Vegetti 2007, 81, footnote 112.

41 πρῶτος δ' ὁ λαχὼν πρῶτος αἱρείσθω βίον, 617e2. The same image, including the drawing of lots and free choice, occurs in *Phaedrus* 249b1–5: 'But in the thousandth year both [those souls punished under the earth and rewarded in heaven] come to draw lots and choose their second life, each seizing whichever form of life it wishes. Then sometimes a human soul passes into beastly life, and sometimes a soul, which was once human, passes from beastly into human form again'.

42 This is the famous αἰτία ἑλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος (617e4–5). It is of key importance for our purpose, and will be the focus of the next section of this chapter.

43 The story of the woeful fate of the hasty tyrant may be intended as the final nail in the coffin of Thrasymachus' thesis, according to which the most unjust men, epitomised by the tyrant, are the happiest (see *Resp*. 344a–c). Halliwell 2007, 476–477 sees this episode as an imitation of Greek tragedy, to which Plato give an ironic tone, in order to avoid the unpleasant emotions usually generated by tragedy.

44 He was one of those souls newly returned from heaven. He had earned his thousand years of bliss through life-long adherence to justice in a well-ordered city; but his virtue was not genuine, because it was the result of habit, and exercised without philosophy (see *Phd.* 82a–c: only the lover of wisdom truly understands what virtue is). Johnson 1999, 9

and make their choices: individuals renowned or ordinary, human or animal alike.[45] Their choices, however, are for the most part determined by their past habits and bad experiences; wisdom plays little part in the evaluation of the offered possibilities.[46]

Once the souls have chosen, they are led back to the feet of Lachesis, who attaches to each soul the δαίμων of its own choosing as a guardian and fulfiller of its destiny; then the δαίμων leads the soul to Clotho, who confirms its fate, and to Atropos, who makes it irreversible. Finally, the souls pass beneath the throne of Necessity[47] and move forward.

It is worth noting that this section contains the most salient philosophical and moral lessons in the myth. Socrates interrupts the narrative in 618b–619a and 619d–e, first to emphasise the notion of personal responsibility[48] and the importance of a life-long philosophical training, through which the ability to discern between the essential and the trivial, the good and the evil, is gained. His second intervention reaffirms the significance of cultivating wisdom properly, but also grants to τύχη some power over the soul's destiny. In relation to what has already been communicated by Er, this section conveys the idea that those who follow justice prompted by outward incentives are not truly just, and that the rewards they reap are transient and productive of great calamity.

observes that Plato intends to discourage those who pursue a just life merely for its external rewards, and to show that they are not *really* just – a really just person 'pursues the Good in all its forms and always tries to choose what will aid him in this pursuit'. This confirms that the seemingly incongruous Myth supports the main argument of the *Republic*.

45 The choosing scene is very dramatic, full of irony and pathos. Er relates: 'That was certainly a sight, said he, worth seeing, how the souls were each choosing their lives; for it was a sight pitiful and ludicrous and wonderful' (619e6–620a2).

46 All the 'souls' listed in this passage are well-known, most of them tragic characters (except for Epeius, a controversial figure, and Thersites, the proverbial foolish commoner). The first mentioned is Orpheus, who, tormented by the outrage he endured from women, refuses to be born again from a woman, and therefore chooses the life of a swan. Similarly Ajax, remembering the insult he had received when he was denied the armour of Achilles, prefers a non-human body, and chooses the life of a lion. The last person to choose is Odysseus, a hero so exhausted by his tribulations, that he seeks, and finds, the life of a private person. His case illustrates the prophet's statement that even for the last in line there will be a good life available. Shorey 1937, 513, footnote *c* gives a short list of passages in which Plato dwells on the formative influence of the past life: *Phd.* 81e ff, *Phdr.* 248–249, *Tim.* 42a–4, 91d ff.

47 The final act of confirmation of the soul's destiny, which now cannot be undone.

48 Thus also Vegetti 2007, 83 footnote 115: 'L'intervento di Sócrates rappresental'interpretazione moralizzante del mito, ponendo l'accento sulla quaestione della scelta responsable del modo di vida'. He goes on to point out some interpretative difficulties raised by Socrates' interjection.

It thus brings the Myth back in agreement with the main argument of the *Republic*: justice should be sought for its own sake, because the just life is the best life. The wise person accepts, but is not lured by, the accidental consequences of justice, materialised in its earthly and heavenly rewards.

Scene four (621a–b): The souls reach the Plain of Oblivion,[49] an expanse of parched land, devoid of any vegetation. In the evening, after a long day's walk, they halt besides the River of Forgetfulness, and receive the instruction to drink from it – all except Er. Tortured by thirst, many souls drink more than they ought to, and thus forget everything they have seen and experienced in the otherworld.[50] Then everyone, including Er, falls fast asleep; at midnight a thunderstorm arises, the earth shakes, and the souls, blazing across the sky like so many shooting stars, are sent to their next embodiment.[51]

Conclusion (621b–d): Here Plato hints at how best to receive the myth and reap its benefits: 'And thus, O Glaucon, the tale was saved and was not forgotten; and it would save us as well, if we would only allow ourselves to be persuaded by it; and we shall thus cross over the river Lethe safely, and our soul shall not suffer defilement' (621b8–c3).[52]

Er's tale is saved in at least two ways. Superficially, it is saved by being narrated in the presence of distinguished young men like Adeimantus and Glaucon, who will embrace its message and impart it in turn to a variety of audiences, so that it may acquire the notoriety of traditional myths, and become part of the Greek-speaking world's culture. More importantly, it is saved as an account – unlike, for instance, the myth of Protagoras (*Tht.* 164d), which has proven to be a failure. Although Er's story is a μῦθος, and as such,

49 τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδίον, 621a2–3. For brief comments on this mythical τόπος see Adam 1902, 621a; Vegetti 2007, 88, footnote 128. In Hesiod's *Theogony* (227), Lethe is a δαίμων, and one of the fearsome daughters of Eris. For the eponymous river, see Stewart 1905, 154–156. It corresponds to the River of Forgetfulness, 'whose water no vessel can hold', and from which the souls drink to forget (621a).

50 Plato here explains, through myth, why we forget the experiences of past lives. The scene implies that a moderate drinker could retain some of his memories, which would be to his advantage during his or her next embodiment. No such soul is mentioned in the Myth, but neither are any philosophical souls, who would be expected to have some mastery over their impulses.

51 In this short section, the redeeming power of reason, or wisdom (φρόνησις), is most strongly emphasised. Only those souls who are led by reason, instead of impulse, will successfully overcome the great challenges of life. See Johnson 1999, 11: 'Of all the scenes in the Myth of Er, this is perhaps the clearest allusion to the overall argument [of the *Republic*]'.

52 Salvation, according to Socrates, may come for those whom the tale has persuaded to seek wisdom, and to avoid the greatest peril of human life – to strive for the pleasurable instead of the good (see 618b–c).

not verifiable or even trustworthy in every minor detail,[53] it is not ἄλογον,[54] because both its purpose and its purport are true and right.[55] In this sense, the Myth of Er, being a true account, will be preserved, while Protagoras' deceptive myth[56] will be forgotten.

Plato may have believed that he was saving not only this particular tale, but also μῦθος in general. The Myth of Er can now serve as a paradigm of reformed myth – according to the outlines given in *Republic* II and III – a model for the composition of more tales to be taught later to the children of Kallipolis. The Myth of Er displays all the main features of a Platonic myth delineated at the opening of this section: it deals with subjects that are impossible to grasp through the exercise of reason alone, it is a fictional narrative, and yet conveys germane and true ideas, and is thus both a μῦθος and a λόγος. The story of Er's wondrous journey also fulfils the two main functions of an enlightening myth: it educates in abstruse matters through pictures and images, and it persuades by appealing to emotions. Finally, and most importantly for the present discussion, the Myth of Er highlights some crucial theological and theodicean ideas, pre-eminent among which is the strategy whose relevance in theodicy has not decreased to the present day: the so called Free-Will Defence. Given Plato's theoretical postulates and conceptual framework, his contribution to this matter may be more aptly named 'Solution from Personal Responsibility'. The rest of this chapter concentrates on this ground-breaking idea and on its corollaries.

2.2 The Αἰτία ἑλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος Dictum

Now that the Myth of Er of *Republic* X has been outlined, it is time to move to its crucial theodicean passage, which, in conjunction with the brief statement in *Republic* 379c2–7, marks the historical beginning of the efforts to provide an answer to the problem of evil, i.e., to produce a theodicy. Despite the intervening seven books, this passage follows the one from *Republic* II almost seamlessly. In the *Republic*, God was found not guilty for the evils that befall mankind, but

53 See *Phd.* 114d.

54 See *Grg.* 523a.

55 Which brings us back to the above discussion on how Plato initially separated, but then blended again the concepts of μῦθος and λόγος.

56 Strictly speaking, the myth of Protagoras (μῦθος ὁ Πρωταγόρειος – which was said to have been undone, ἀπώλετο) is not a tale, but a philosopheme – so is Protagoras' doctrine according to which 'a thing is for each person what it seems to him to be'. Similarly, Theaetetus' myth conveys his suggestion that knowledge is perception (*Tht.* 164d9–10).

the reader was left in the dark as for the possible culprit(s). Plato in the Myth of Er again emphasises God's blamelessness, but also points the finger at those he considers culpable for the calamities. Here follows the paragraph where God's liability is unequivocally denied, and where Lachesis' prophet affirms that the free moral agent is the source of the universally experienced reality of affliction, moral depravity, and other undesirable conditions:

> Now, after they had arrived, they immediately had to appear before Lachesis. There, a prophet first set them apart according to their respective places in the line, and then, taking from Lachesis' lap lots and patterns of lives, and ascending a high platform, he uttered the following: 'Hear the word of Necessity's maiden daughter, Lachesis: O souls that live for a day, this is the beginning of another mortal cycle for a death-bearing breed. No δαίμων shall obtain you by lot, but you shall choose your own δαίμων. And let the one who has been assigned the first place by lot be the first one to choose a life with which he shall be joined through necessity. Virtue, however, has no master, and each person shall have more or less of it, depending on how he honours or slights it. The responsibility is upon him who makes the choice; God is guiltless'.[57] (617d1–e5)

Next, Er provides some details about the process of choosing and its consequences:

> Having said these words, the prophet threw the lots towards them all, and each soul picked up the one that fell close to it, except for Er, to whom it was not allowed. And to each one who picked the lot, it was quite clear what number it had drawn. Then the prophet in turn placed on the ground in front of them patterns of life, far more numerous than the souls present. And they were of every kind (617e6–618a3)[58] […] The rank

57 σφᾶς οὖν, ἐπειδὴ ἀφικέσθαι, εὐθὺς δεῖν ἰέναι πρὸς τὴν Λάχεσιν. προφήτην οὖν τινα σφᾶς πρῶτον μὲν ἐν τάξει διαστῆσαι, ἔπειτα λαβόντα ἐκ τῶν τῆς Λαχέσεως γονάτων κλήρους τε καὶ βίων παραδείγματα, ἀναβάντα ἐπί τι βῆμα ὑψηλὸν εἰπεῖν – 'Ἀνάγκης θυγατρὸς κόρης Λαχέσεως λόγος. Ψυχαὶ ἐφήμεροι, ἀρχὴ ἄλλης περιόδου θνητοῦ γένους θανατηφόρου. οὐχ ὑμᾶς δαίμων λήξεται, ἀλλ› ὑμεῖς δαίμονα αἱρήσεσθε. πρῶτος δ' ὁ λαχὼν πρῶτος αἱρείσθω βίον ᾧ συνέσται ἐξ ἀνάγκης. ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον, ἣν τιμῶν καὶ ἀτιμάζων πλέον καὶ ἔλαττον αὐτῆς ἕκαστος ἕξει. αἰτία ἑλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος.

58 ταῦτα εἰπόντα ῥῖψαι ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς κλήρους, τὸν δὲ παρ› αὑτὸν πεσόντα ἕκαστον ἀναιρεῖσθαι πλὴν οὗ, ἓδὲ οὐκ ἐᾶν· τῷ δὲ ἀνελομένῳ δῆλον εἶναι ὁπόστος εἰλήχει. μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο αὖθις τὰ τῶν βίων παραδείγματα εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν σφῶν θεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, πολὺ πλείω τῶν παρόντων. εἶναι δὲ παντοδαπά·

> of the soul was, however, not included, because a different sort inevitably arose with the choice of each life. But the other things were all mixed with one another, things related to wealth and poverty, to disease and health, as well as those intermediate to these.[59] (618b2–6)

The main massage of these passages may be formulated in a simple and straightforward way: the responsibility for whatever happens in one's life lies with each person who deliberately chooses some particular course of action and state of being, while God remains blameless and free from responsibility (αἰτία ἑλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος, 617e4–5). Nonetheless obscurities and difficulties of interpretation remain, especially concerning the αἰτία ἑλομένου proposition.

It is rather obvious that the αἰτία ἑλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος dictum consists of two distinct, but closely related propositions. The second, θεὸς ἀναίτιος, does not require much comment; it is a restatement of the thesis introduced in *Republic* II, which Plato took to be clearly demonstrated at 379a–c. While in *Republic* II the question of God's responsibility for badness only arose with respect to humans (ὀλίγων μὲν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις αἴτιος, πολλῶν δὲ ἀναίτιος, 379c4), the Myth of Er offers a wider purview. Birds and beasts are included both among the life-patterns offered for choice (618a4), and among the souls who choose (620a7–b; 620d3): this implies that God must be also absolved from responsibility for the suffering of non-human animals. However, since Plato places no particular emphasis on this issue, after noting some similarities with the pattern of inter-species transmigration in *Phaedo* 81d–82d,[60] we shall lay it to rest.

On the contrary, the αἰτία ἑλομένου proposition and its context raise a couple of complex issues and require more detailed elaboration. The first challenge bears on the purpose of the lot-casting within the broader frame of Plato's intention to absolve the deity from responsibility for evil, as well as on its status as either independent from or instigated by the gods. A corollary to these is the significance and impact of τύχη, introduced in the fabric of the myth through the random falling of the lots, which shall also be touched upon briefly. The second challenge is to understand how Plato might have conceived of and justified the notion of moral responsibility (and other related issues) that is

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59 ψυχῆς δὲ τάξιν οὐκ ἐνεῖναι διὰ τὸ ἀναγκαίως ἔχειν ἄλλον ἑλομένην βίον ἀλλοίαν γίγνεσθαι· τὰ δ› ἄλλα ἀλλήλοις τε καὶ πλούτοις καὶ πενίαις, τὰ δὲ νόσοις, τὰ δ› ὑγιείαις μεμεῖχθαι, τὰ δὲ καὶ μεσοῦν τούτων.

60 Both in the Myth of Er and in the *Phaedo* the souls transmigrate into bodies suited to their character: the just and gentle into tame and socially organised animals, the rude and violent into savage animals, and *vice versa*.

implied by the above proposition. These questions are going to be addressed in the last two sections of this chapter, respectively.

2.3 The Theodicean Significance of the Lottery Episode in the Myth of Er

Addressing the purpose of the lottery in the structure of the myth, Mark McPherran writes: 'Every commentator on the Myth of Er has rightly understood Plato's insertion of the initial lottery to be his way of initially absolving the gods of moral responsibility for each soul's choice of life and the consequences that accompany that choice'.[61] This generalising interpretation, although largely uncorroborated, is reasonable – with bringing into play the lot-casting element Plato must have intended to divert the responsibility from God to τύχη.[62] What remains uncertain is how successful this enterprise is, and how big a role it plays in the overall argument for God's blamelessness, i.e., how broad its scope is. We shall first examine some objections to its credibility raised in McPherran 2010, and then briefly address the amplitude of its scope.

In the introduction to his contribution, McPherran expresses doubts regarding the fairness of the lot-casting procedure, which, if confirmed, will clearly cast a long shadow on the entire project of absolving God from responsibility for badness. 'Unfortunately, it is unclear if the lottery is rigged in some fashion'.[63] This assumption, however, does not seem to stand on a very firm ground. First, there is no textual evidence whatsoever suggestive of fraud in the lottery. Second, and more importantly, there is no sufficient reason for it to happen. For if any fraud is involved in the lot-casting, a natural reaction would be to ask by whom and for whose benefit is it done? The rigging clearly must be effectuated by a god or by some other divine being. Now, if one wants to exclude from divine nature properties such as fickleness, inconstancy, and

61 McPherran 2010, 136.

62 Nevertheless, McPherran's argument supporting this conclusion is not receivable: 'Any doubts on this score can be settled by looking at Book 5, 460a, where the marriage lottery – albeit a 'sophisticated' lottery, meaning a 'fixed' one – is introduced with the explicit aim of deflecting blame from the guardians onto *tuchē*' (2010, 136). Had Plato conceived the lottery of the myth as analogous to the marriage lottery, he would have only created an *appearance* of blamelessness, because at *Resp*. 460a the responsibility for the matches is the guardians', and not anybody else's. Thus, the analogy contradicts the θεὸς ἀναίτιος assertion, and suggests deliberate deceit on the part of the deity. This does not suit the image of God that Plato wants to convey.

63 McPherran 2010, 133.

gratuitous spite – and thus deny that any divine being would perpetuate such an elaborate fraud simply as a pastime – the beneficiaries would have to be souls among those designated by lot to choose first. This, however, would imply that the gods are biased, either through an error in judgment, or by being induced to partiality by gifts and supplication. The former is impossible, since in the gods not a trace of ignorance abides.[64] The latter is also implausible: in the lottery scene of the Myth of Er, the only deities involved are Lachesis and her (semi-divine) prophet. Lachesis is a daughter of the goddess Necessity, and therefore incorruptible; this also warrants for the integrity of the prophet, her chosen spokesman. Furthermore, even if they were not associated with Necessity, an emblem of the unalterable, rational cosmic law, there is no place in Plato's theology for a deficient[65] or corruptible deity.[66] As such, the suggestion of divine interference in the lottery's outcome can safely be dismissed.[67]

McPherran 2010, 138 voices another concern: 'Plato mysteriously undermines his insulation project by describing the lot-caster as a *prophet*, thus a being who can in theory know in advance the outcome of his toss. The semi-divine prophet could, then, influence his toss in a non-random way'. However, him being a prophet does not imply that he knows everything that will transpire in the future, including the outcome of the throw and the best possible way to rearrange it in order to achieve the desired end, whatever that may be. And even if he did possess full knowledge of the future (at least regarding the lottery), knowing that an event will take place does not necessarily imply any causal impulse aimed at altering it in any way. The prophet could very well know the outcome, and let it be.[68]

A more significant doubt is expressed in the last paragraph of the same page: '[F]or the audience Plato has the prophet address – the disembodied souls *and* Plato's own readers – the casting of lots (*klēroi*) was not a way of making decision via a random selection; rather, it was a way of allowing *the*

64 Furthermore, in *Gorgias* 523a–524a Plato sets up an elaborate mythical scene with very particular rules, specifically meant to exclude the possibility of erroneous judgment even in the case of demigods, namely the three judges of the dead.

65 See *Resp.* 381c.

66 See *Leg.* 905d–907b.

67 Theoretically, the possibility that the prophet could make an error or be lured into cheating remains open; but there is no indication in the text to support such an assumption.

68 In this regard, it is also important to bear in mind the primary meaning of the word προφήτης. It does not refer to someone who sees the future, but to 'one who speaks for a god and interprets his will to men', Liddel *et al.* 1996, 1540. This is an important consideration which McPherran disregards in his objection.

gods to decide an issue'. If this statement accurately reflected how Plato's contemporaries interpreted the matter, it would discredit severely the practice of lot-casting as insulation technique. It appears, however, that the reality of fifth- and fourth-century Athens was different. Admittedly, there may have been a period when lot-casting was received as an expression of the divine will, both in Greece and elsewhere, but we have very little, if any, evidence that such intuition was current during the age of the *Republic*.[69]

To start with, none of the references from Plato's work provided by McPherran to support his claims that the gods could manipulate the outcome of the lot-casting achieve the intended result.[70] The references to the *Timaeus* are unusual, to say the least: neither 34b–36d, nor 46c–47e mention a lottery as a manifestation of divine interference. The first passage focuses on the construction of the World Soul and the distribution of the soul-stuff into the circles of the Same and the Different, while the second examines the auxiliary causes that facilitate the function of the sense organs, and the benefits that these provide to humans.

The two references from the *Laws*, although closer to the point, also fail to show that Plato himself considered the falling of the lots as an expression of divine will. 690c gives nothing more than the information that lot-casting is one of the methods available to establish the right to rule, and that this type of rule originates in the favour of God and in good fortune.[71] There is no suggestion that the lottery is a way of allowing the gods to decide; the passage but states that the one chosen to rule by lot is loved by the gods and favoured by fortune – which is a much weaker claim than the former.

McPherran's second reference, namely 756e–758a, in fact contradicts, rather than supports, the idea that lot-casting was a way to let the gods decide. First, 756e explains that after a group of counsellors is chosen by lot, they are subjected to testing – an absurd step had the legislator considered lot casting as divine ordinance. Second, at 757b–c Plato explicitly distinguishes between two types of equality – a superficial, arithmetical equality, determined by number, and a true, proportional equality, which gives the due measure to each person according to their nature. Now, the application of the first type of equality is secured by lot-casting,[72] while the second is ordained and supported by Zeus

69 This dialogue probably became available to the public sometime between 390–360 BC. For the difficulties involved in establishing the *Republic*'s dramatic as well as compositional date, see Nails 1998.

70 See McPherran 2010, 144, footnote 22.

71 θεοφιλῆ δέ γε καὶ εὐτυχῆ τινα […] ἀρχήν, 690c5–6.

72 κλήρῳ ἀπευθύνων εἰς τὰς διανομὰς αὐτήν, 757b5.

himself.[73] The text clearly states that the outcome of the lot is not predetermined by Zeus; rather, Zeus supports the principle that the worthy should receive greater goods and honours than the less worthy. Finally, this passage explains that legislators are forced occasionally to resort to lot-casting, to foster justice and prevent discontent and discord among the masses. They should 'pray, calling upon God and good luck (θεὸν καὶ ἀγαθὴν τύχην) to guide for them the lot rightly towards the highest justice' (757e4–6). They should also attempt to resort to the form of equality 'which needs luck (τύχη) [...] as seldom as possible' (758a1–2). These passages therefore establish that Plato does not consider lot-casting as an instrument of God's will, but as a genuinely democratic (and therefore not wholly laudable) means of establishing order in the state and equality among its citizens.[74] Moreover, he warns against using it repeatedly, and recommends to accompany lot-casting with prayers to God and Lady Luck, so that they may positively influence the otherwise random outcome. Were McPherran's claim correct, lot-casting would not be so obviously discredited by Plato, and would not require one to seek a separate divine intervention.[75]

For Plato, then, lot-casting was *not* a means of letting the gods express their will. And neither was it so for his contemporaries, and consequently, for his readers. In the everyday political life of Athens, the drawing of lots was too mundane and too common an occurrence to have had any supernatural import attached to it:

> The Athenian democracy entrusted to citizens drawn by lot most of the functions not performed by the Popular Assembly (*ekklēsia*). This principle applied mainly to the magistracies (*archai*). Of the approximately

73 Διὸς γὰρ δὴ κρίσις ἐστί, 757b7.

74 For a concise discussion of the principles of arithmetical and proportional equality, and references to the works of Aristotle and Isocrates where the same subject is treated in greater length, see Manin 1997, 35–38.

75 Another passage in the *Laws*, not mentioned by McPherran, does seem to ascribe the outcome of lot-casting to divine will – 759b7–c1: 'As for the priests, we shall entrust it to God himself to ensure his own good pleasure, by committing their appointment to the divine chance of the lot (κληροῦν οὕτω τῇ θείᾳ τύχῃ ἀποδιδόντα)'. Nevertheless, even this is still far from conclusive. For one, it refers to a very specific case, namely the appointment of the gods' personal servants. Since this is a case of dealing directly with the divine, in this particular instance the falling of the lot may be guided by hand of a god and by divine luck. And yet, in the next sentence, Plato states that each priest thus appointed should always be carefully examined (δοκιμάζειν δὲ τὸν ἀεὶ λαγχάνοντα, 759c2), to ascertain that he or she is sufficiently pure and honourable to perform this duty. This shows that θεία τύχη, whatever it may be, cannot be fully trusted, and therefore should not be taken as a transparent token of divine will.

> 700 magistrate posts that made up the Athenian administration, some 600 were filled by lot.[76]

Besides, the members of the Council (βουλή) were also appointed by lot, and the judges (δικασταί) too were selected by lot out of the pool of heliasts. All these officials were subjected to a thorough examination before they could take up their office, and the magistrates were at any time liable to impeachment, even punishment – hardly evidence of trust in divine decision. Furthermore, many reliable ancient sources associate lot-casting with democratic rule, a very mundane activity. Aristotle identifies the practice of selection by lot in the constitution of Draco (622 or 621 BCE),[77] and calls it a democratic principle.[78] Herodotus,[79] a generation after Plato, stresses the selection of magistrates by lot as the most prominent feature of the best, i.e., the democratic, government.[80]

Finally, Xenophon's Socrates, at least according to his indicter, ridiculed the democratic practice of appointing public officials by lot: 'none would choose a pilot or builder or flautist by lot, nor any other craftsman for a work in which mistakes are far less disastrous than mistakes in statecraft'.[81] It is unlikely that he would have uttered such words if he had believed that selection by lot had anything to do with divine providence. Therefore, McPherran's concern is clearly unfounded – neither Plato, nor his audience, were prone to consider the outcome of lot-casting to be directed by the gods.[82] As such, the drawing of lots in the Myth of Er is justified as an initial technique for exonerating the gods from responsibility.

The conclusions drawn in the last two sentences raise further questions: (a) if the falling of the lot is not determined by a divine ordinance, what is the origin of its outcome? (b) what is the precise nature of the responsibility from which the gods are exonerated?

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76 Manin 1997, 11.

77 *Ath. Pol.* 4, but he is probably mistaken. See Hansen 1991, 49–52.

78 *Pol.* 1294b8.

79 *Hdt.* III. 80.

80 For further textual references on this point, see Manin 1997, 27, footnote 48.

81 *Mem.* 1.2.9 (tr. Marchant 1997, 17). For an echo of this criticism in Plato, see *Prt.* 319c–d.

82 Hansen 1991, 50–51, and Manin 1997, 25–26, examine the theory that the origin and significance of the selection of magistrates by lot were religiously inspired – a theory developed already in the nineteenth century. Hansen concludes that it is not supported by any single convincing source, and Manin believes that the theory 'no longer enjoys currency among today's specialists'. Finley, 1983, 12, considering the period 'from [...] the mid-seventh century, to the conquest by Alexander the Great or a little later' is resolute: 'Many Greek communities selected their officials by lot as a matter of routine, without any suggestion that the choice was thereby being transferred to the gods'.

Luck, or chance (τύχη)[83] presents itself as an immediate answer to (a). However, Plato's understanding of the word τύχη and the concept that it encapsulates remains unclear and must be addressed briefly here. We shall first try to determine what the word does not stand for, and only after that what it could refer to within the context of the Myth of Er.

The τύχη of the myth is not the θεία μοῖρα or θεία τύχη of the poets - for the reasons given above, and because Plato discusses deities and luck separately, as two distinct factors, in both *Republic* 619c and *Laws* 757e. Neither can it be assimilated to Plato's 'later *Timaeus* view of the causes of evil […] that he locates in the disorderly motions of matter':[84] in the Myth of Er, luck or chance plays only a minor role as an explanans for the occurrence of badness, since the emphasis is placed on the soul's wrong choice, prompted by ignorance. Furthermore, τύχη and Ἀναγκη (the goddess) are distinct, if not contrasting, characters in the myth, while in the *Timaeus*, Necessity and the wandering cause that produces random results are presented as a single entity.[85] The τύχη of the myth also differs from Aristotle's much more complex τύχη of *Physics* II. 5 – an accidental or coincidental cause, found among things that are for the sake of something and which involve decision making, i.e., a conscious agent.[86] Indeed, Plato does not provide a definition of τύχη, either in the myth, or anywhere else in the *Republic*; it seems that he sees τύχη as a brute fact resembling the popular concept of chance – the inexplicable randomness of events which we believe to witness on a daily basis. It is probably similar to the deficient τύχη of Empedocles and Democritus. Aristotle reprimands them for evoking it without providing any discussion or explanation.[87]

83 *Resp.* 619d7. Plato accepts, both in ordinary parlance and on an ontological level, that chance and randomness can influence events. For the former see, e.g., *Resp.* 460a, 619c; for the latter *Tim.* 34c2–3, ἀλλά πως ἡμεῖς πολὺ μετέχοντες τοῦ προστυχόντος τε καὶ εἰκῇ – 'but as we to a large degree partake of the accidental and the random'.

84 McPherran 2010, 144, footnote 6.

85 Necessity and chance are also conflated in *Laws* 889c1: κατὰ τύχην ἐξ ἀνάγκης – 'the chance (results) arise from necessity'.

86 The outcome of lot-casting is also unlikely to belong to the set of events that arise from spontaneity (the spontaneous – τὸ αὐτόματον, discussed in Aristotle's *Phys.* II. 6). Spontaneous events come to pass not for the sake of what actually results, and in this sense occur in vain (see *Phys.* 197b17–32), while the lot-casting is not of such nature.

87 *Phys.* 196a17–36. Plutarch also understood the myth's τύχη as genuine chance, for which no cause should be sought (*Quaest. conv.* 740 D). He mentions the variety of upbringing and social circumstances that people suffer or enjoy as an example of chance. This suggests that he saw the Myth of Er as a fully-fledged allegory, and interpreted the choice of lives episode as an illustration of our freedom to choose virtue instead of vice. He uses the Aristotelian *τὸ ἐφ›* ἡμῖν (up to us) to refer to this freedom of choice. For the importance of

In the preceding pages, the mysterious prophet's lot-casting has been interpreted as a successful strategy for diverting responsibility from God to τύχη. Now a few words are due to the question what the gods are really absolved from through the lot-casting process, i.e., to question (b) above. This issue is coextensive with the unresolved problem of the strategy's scope, which was raised at the beginning of the discussion of the lot-casting in the myth and its interpretation offered by McPherran, and therefore one simple answer will have to suffice for both. Plato's text occasionally implies that both κλῆρος and τύχη play a significant role in shaping the soul's future life. Such *loci* are 619d7 – διὰ τὴν τοῦ κλήρου τύχην,[88] and 619e1–2 – ὁ κλῆρος αὐτῷ τῆς αἱρέσεως μὴ ἐν τελευταίοις πίπτοι.[89] It is, however, very difficult to discern Plato's intention behind these statements, since 'the myth does not indicate how a soul's allotted position in the queue affects its choice of life'.[90] Moreover, they also contradict other significant passages and examples, not to mention the overall idea that the chooser alone is responsible for his or her life and destiny. At 618a the prophet scatters on the ground the patterns of lives, which are far more numerous than the souls present.[91] Next, at 619b, he unequivocally states that even the last soul in the line may acquire a good life and not a bad one, as long as they choose wisely.[92] Finally, the only soul, among those listed in the myth, whose choice is not a terrible mistake, or purely a matter of reactive, emotional selection, is the soul of Odysseus – exactly the last soul in the line.[93] Although these observations do not conclusively invalidate the claim that τύχη, the power behind the lot-casting's outcome, has a significant influence on the soul's destiny, they do present a challenge, and place the burden of proof on those who accept the claim. In the absence of such proof, it seems safe to conclude that 'the point of

recognising the power to choose good instead of evil – which is entirely up to us – and its formative influence on happy life, see *De tranq. anim.* 476 D–477 B.

88 The alternation of good and evil befalls the soul because of its indolence, and 'on account of the luck of the lot'.

89 Happiness in the next life is achievable if one pursues philosophy soundly, and 'if the lot doesn't fall in such a way that he is among the last ones to choose'.

90 Inwood 2009, 42.

91 πολὺ πλείω τῶν παρόντων, 618a2–3. Maybe there will be no more philosophical lives left for those who come last in the queue (see Halliwell 2007, 465–466), or maybe only animal or barbarian lives will remain. Yet the text gives no indication that the patterns are exhaustible, or that there are more patterns of artisans' lives than of philosophers' lives.

92 καὶ τελευταίῳ ἐπιόντι, ξὺν νῷ ἑλομένῳ, συντόνως ζῶντι κεῖται βίος ἀγαπητός, οὐ κακός, 619b3–5. Cf. *Phlb*. 61e.

93 Besides his proverbial μῆτις (wisdom, skill), being last in the line may explain Odysseus' judicious choice – he had more time to consider his options and to avoid making a hasty decision.

the lottery must be that it forms an orderly queue for the choice of lives, not that it seriously affects the choice that is eventually made'.[94] Thus, the insulating power of the strategy is limited to the placement of the souls in the queue, as Plato explicitly states at 617e8. Its obvious merits on the level of the narrative in this mythical tale are that it provides an orderly system for the selection process and thus avoid disorder and disturbance, as well as that it discourages those dissatisfied with their place in the line from blaming the gods for that.

2.4 Αἰτία ἑλομένου: the Problem of Free Agency and Individual Moral Accountability

The entire project of absolving God from responsibility in the Myth of Er rests on the affirmation of the soul's moral responsibility, enacted through its supposedly free choice. Thus, the greatest challenge to arise in the myth's concise theodicy is the necessity to demonstrate that the soul is indeed the chooser, and that its choice (αἵρεσις) is not meddled with in any way, i.e., that it is factually free. This section submits that it is indeed so, and that the claim of individual moral responsibility withstands the charges of determinism and infinite regress of accountability directed against it by Annas, Halliwell, etc., in the first case, and by McPherran, Inwood, etc., in the second. Furthermore, this section argues against Annas' and Thayer's allegations that the memory loss, which is one of the consequences of the reincarnation process, absolves the agents from culpability for the mistakes committed in their previous lives, because such loss implies a discontinuity of personal identity. Before engaging with these issues, however, we shall examine two minor difficulties related to the act of choosing, and attempt to provide a provisional Platonic account of the concept of freedom of choice that seems to be operational in the Myth of Er.

As mentioned above, already the first statement of Lachesis' mysterious prophet, following his introductory words at 617d8, strongly emphasises the moral responsibility of the agent: 'no δαίμων shall obtain you by lot, but you shall choose your own δαίμων'.[95] Furthermore, the focus in the main narrative of the myth is precisely on the souls' individual and unrestrained choice

94 Inwood 2009, 43.

95 617e1–2: οὐχ ὑμᾶς δαίμων λήξεται, ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς δαίμονα αἱρήσεσθε. Because of the use of the word λήξομαι (from λαγχάνειν – 'to obtain by lot'), this may also be read as an allusion to the lottery episode of the myth (617d–619e), and to its far lesser significance in comparison to the individual's own choice: 'your destiny will not be assigned to you by lot (whether it be directed by chance or by the divine) but will be a matter of your own making'.

of their next embodiment, and on the events preceding and following this choice. Plato seems to suggest that, if an action originates in an individual's own choice, the responsibility for this action and its consequences also belong to this individual, and not to God. Although this is perhaps a plausible interpretation, there are at least two peculiar restrictions applicable to the account of choice-making that will be examined in the following two paragraphs. Next, we shall address the conceptual difficulty of determining how Plato envisaged the notions of freedom and responsibility, and then move on to some grave objections that threaten to taint and overturn the myth's theodicean effort.

The first restriction to consider in the account of choice-making is that no soul is at liberty to choose not to make a choice.[96] To make a decision and embark in a new life is absolutely compulsory, since it is Necessity's law, implemented and supervised by her three formidable daughters.[97] Nonetheless, this restriction does not present a real problem; the alternative is to remain in *bardo* state indefinitely, or, to transpose the situation to everyday life, to remain utterly inactive and refrain from making decisions, which ordinarily is impossible.

Another minor restriction is that the assortment of life-patterns offered to the souls for their next earthly existence is wide, but still contains limitations. For example, the pattern of the life of a jolly, math-loving duck does not exist. Even so, the variety of life-patterns is sufficient to provide a satisfactory future existence even for those with extravagant taste. There must be some constraints because the universe is of a certain nature, and in order to be as rational and good as possible, it cannot be otherwise. Thus, these two restrictions stem from the workings of Necessity, whose strict laws both souls and corporeal objects must obey.

2.4.1 *A Platonic Account of Freedom and Responsibility*

With these non-threatening challenges set aside, the weightiest issue of the myth's compressed theodicy and affirmation of moral responsibility now may be addressed. In other words, the purpose of this section is to corroborate the implied, but not explicitly demonstrated, inference that the soul's choice (αἵρεσις) is truly free, as well as to define the meaning of the term 'freedom' in the present context.

These questions do not appear to trouble Plato. Presumably, he regards the ability to make choices as sufficiently unrestrained to be called 'free', and considers that no additional argument is required to support his assertion that each individual is morally responsible for the evils that befall him or her,

96 See Thayer 1988, 372.

97 The Moirai: Lachesis, Clotho and Atropos.

which in turn exonerates God of all blame.[98] Indeed, the question of freedom and accountability is not explicitly discussed in the Platonic corpus – it only becomes problematic with the Stoics' insistence on causal determinism[99] – but careful examination of the hints that he provides allows to identify the outline of his theory of free choice and moral responsibility.[100] Considering Plato's distinctly dissimilar metaphysics and psychology, his ideas are likely to be different from the Stoic concept of freedom as absence of external constrains, which makes the act of choice free, although inevitable, given the soul's previous states. For Plato, the question of freedom of choice and responsibility would have been closely associated with his understanding of the immortal soul as essentially rational. To put it plainly, freedom, in Plato's view, would be a specific motion of the soul, motion in accordance with reason. It stands for the ability to do otherwise even when assaulted by passions and tempted to follow the urges of our lower nature – the ability to choose the good instead of the bad. We are morally responsible for our choices because the faculty to choose remains accessible to us, since it stems from the best part of our composite self, i.e., from the self-moving rational soul.[101] Socrates exerted this very faculty during and after his trial, and chose the best over the advantageous, even though he could foresee the dire consequences of his decision, as is confirmed in the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo*.

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98 This applies only to the rudimentary theodicy of the Myth of Er. Plato's theodicean considerations in the *Timaeus* and *Laws* X are much more complex.

99 Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that Plato remained convinced throughout that the individual *is* to blame or to praise for his or her deeds (see, e.g., *Leg*. 904b8–904e3). The first substantial discussion of the issue of moral responsibility occurs in Aristotle; the *locus classicus* is *Eth. Nic.* III.1–5 (for a careful examination of the subject and related issues, see Meyer 2011). Bobzien 1998 offers the most comprehensive exploration of the Stoics' views on determinism and moral responsibility.

100 To reiterate, any account of Plato's theory of freedom must remain tentative, owing to the lack of textual evidence.

101 '[T]he higher self, the intellect guaranties that human beings [...] do have access to the universal principles governing the world, and to the good [...]. Rational deliberation is understood as integrally involved in the causal structures of the world rather than as something that can break or surpass those structures', Remes 2007, 181. Proclus (*In R.* II.278.11–14) writes: 'Therefore it befits the soul to blame itself, on account of the failure to use the truth-abiding criteria it possesses, and for using instead mistaken standards of good and their opposites'. The truth-abiding criteria are 'the realities which every soul has by nature beheld before entering a human body' (*Phdr*. 249e4–5); cf. Proclus' *In Alc.* 135–136, in O'Neill 1971, 89–90. In all likelihood, Plato would not have objected to Proclus' interpretation. For a relatively brief elucidation of Proclus' engaging commentary on the Myth of Er, see Dillon 2015.

Of course, his is an extreme example, but it nevertheless perfectly conveys the state of mind of a person who knows himself to be an immortal soul, and who is governed solely by reason.[102] Such an individual is a free agent in the fullest sense of the phrase,[103] able to identify with, and empower the λογιστικόν part of the soul to rule the entire living entity. Socrates' case shows that this goal is achievable, while the entire Platonic philosophy may be interpreted as an incentive to pursue it.[104]

But may such an ideal be put in practice within the confines of Plato's own psychological theory? Is this freedom of choice – from which moral responsibility ensues – indeed accessible to everyone, and if yes, on what basis? These questions can be answered in the affirmative, on account of the Platonic tenet that the agent is indistinct from the rational soul. Indeed, any human being is naturally disposed to experience second-order desires,[105] which stem from τὸ λογιστικόν and are concerned with accepting or refusing the impulsive urges of the appetitive and spirited parts. In brief, freedom and responsibility in Plato may be analysed as follows.

The advent of the tripartite soul of *Republic* IV enables Plato to confirm and explain incontinence as a psychic phenomenon: acting against one's best interest results from the forcible assaults of passions. Nevertheless, he also remains committed to the old Socratic tenet that no one errs willingly,[106] and claims in the *Timaeus* that a fair share of incontinent actions can be traced down either to some physiological state, or to ignorance: 'through some bad condition of the body, and through uneducated upbringing, the evil person becomes

102 For Socrates' self-realisation, see his remarkable answer to the question of how he should be buried: 'Anyway you wish, provided you catch me, and I don't flee away from you' (*Phd.* 115c4–5). For his exclusive reliance on good reason, see *Cri.* 46b4–6: 'Because not just now, but also always I have been such as to be persuaded by nothing with regard to things pertaining to me apart from the argument which on reflection appears the best'. Cf. *Ap.* 40a–c.

103 For a detailed articulation of this idea, see Plotinus' *Enn.* III.1.5–8.

104 Note, once again, the famous ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν maxim (*Tht.* 176b1–2; cf. *Resp.* 613b1, *Leg.* 716c6–7) and its interpretation as a pivotal feature of Plato's thought given in Sedley 1999. In his concluding advice in *Timaeus* 90a–d, Plato also urges us to devote all our attention to the divine part in us.

105 This is how Gerson (2007, 267), following Frankfurt, designates the faculty to be 'simultaneously the subject of one desire and the subject of the desire to have the first desire not be an effective cause of action'.

106 See *Ap.* 37a5; *Prt.* 345d8, 358c7; *Grg.* 488a3; *Resp.* 589c6; *Tim.* 85d2, 85e1; *Leg.* 731c–d. Consider, however, Dillon's insightful observation: 'The Platonic position … is obviously not that vice is involuntary in the sense of something one cannot help, but rather that it is something which one cannot will, as such' (1993, 190).

evil'.[107] Because we usually have no control over our physiological states, they may be considered as external constraints, as far as the embodied soul is concerned. Ignorance, however, may be divided into two types: non-culpable and culpable. Non-culpable ignorance is caused and fostered by external factors, such as inappropriate parenting, bad teachers, or an unfavourable social environment. Thus, a person born and raised in a community who only follows the CNN news, collectively believes that they accurately represent the political reality of the world, and does not have access to other sources of information, should not be held responsible for acting according to the beliefs generated by these news, even if those beliefs do not reflect the truth. Culpable ignorance, on the other hand, is the type of ignorance regarding which it can be said that the agent should, and could, have known better, when determining a course of action.[108]

In the Myth of Er, the failure of the soul who is about to make a choice belongs to culpable ignorance. Such a soul is almost a 'clean slate'; even though it carries within itself character traits and impressions from its past life that have the power to influence its αἵρεσις, their power has been lessened, or even cancelled, by the soul's recent experience. Indeed, the situation of the souls in the afterlife is unique: they remember the punishments and rewards that they have received for their sinful and pious deeds, and discuss them at the assembly of souls (614e–616a); they are allowed to contemplate the workings of the universe, and meet superhuman beings (616b–617c); they are aware of their disembodied state and of the necessity to proceed to their next incarnation (617d–e). The whole scenery portrays an environment highly favourable for making rational choices. Therefore, a soul such as the one who chose the life of a tyrant, and obtained the evils inherent to this life, could certainly have chosen otherwise. As a rational entity, the soul enjoys unhindered access to the higher faculty of reason, from which the corrective and governing second-order desires stem,[109] and possesses the necessary information. And yet the

107 διὰ δὲ πονηρὰν ἕξιν τινὰ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἀπαίδευτον τροφὴν ὁ κακὸς γίγνεται κακός, 86e1–2.

108 Alcinous, in his *Didaskalikos*, seems to claim that all wrongdoing, although involuntary, is nevertheless culpable: 'even if unjust acts are involuntary, one should nonetheless punish the doers of injustice, and the punishments should vary in degree [...] the involuntariness may arise either from ignorance or from the onset of some passion, and all such latter stages can be got rid of by reasoning and good habituation and care' (tr. Dillon 1993, 42). Cf. *Resp*. 518d10–e2.

109 'The subject of the second-order desire is specifically the 'man within the man' to whom Plato refers in *Republic* 589a7–8. His desires are also rational in a way that the first-order desires are not: They do not belong to a subject with which he is not really or ideally identical', Gerson 2007, 269.

soul who chose the life of a tyrant succumbed to the temptation of sovereignty, and the responsibility for his act belongs to him alone. His error was in fact a cognitive one, an error of identification, combined to his disregard for the knowledge he had acquired, and with impetuosity. Thus, in the Myth of Er, the ignorance displayed by the souls who made wrong choices is culpable. Even though they had received the appropriate incentives to make a rational decision, they decided to follow the impulses of passion or pride, which they accepted as the driving forces behind their desire to acquire the alleged good. As such, they cannot reasonably claim non-culpable ignorance, nor suggest that they are not responsible for not recognising the best course of action.

2.4.2 *The Challenge of Determinism*

Bearing this probable account in mind, let us now turn to the most important objections to the *Republic* X theodicy, which, to reiterate, relies exclusively on the presupposition of the free agent's moral responsibility. Namely, some critics allege that Plato's theodicean argument in the Myth of Er is flawed exactly because the premise 'the choice is free' is unfounded. Julia Annas notes that the overall tone of the Myth of Er is deterministic: 'The cosmos in this myth whirls round the spindle of Necessity; the process is regulated by the Fates. The language of the passage is full of references to fate and necessity'.[110] Therefore, the rewards and punishments may not be really suited to what the person has done or chosen.

This objection, however, does not truly undermine Plato's purpose. First, the goddess Ἀναγκη in the Myth of Er does not represent blind deterministic law, but rather, a principle of rational and teleological governance of the Universe, aiming at the good of the whole.[111] Second, even though the references to fate and necessity are numerous, a soul only becomes subjected to those 'powers' after the free choice has been made,[112] according to the rule that a choice once made cannot be undone, i.e., that the decision is binding. Making the right choice is undeniably a challenging task, and is described as 'the whole danger for a human being' (618b7), because the knowledge it requires is very complex.[113] However, in the end the choice is simply between better and worse,

110 Annas 1982, 133.

111 See p. 51 above. This is not to say that Necessity's universe is not causally deterministic and hierarchically organised, but only that its determinism is easily reconcilable with the exercise of freedom of choice.

112 This is the case in all the examples quoted by Annas: 618b3, 619c1, 620d6–621a1.

113 See 618b6–619b1, and Gonzalez 2012, 264–265.

between a just and an unjust life (618d5–e2).[114] Fate enters the stage only after the choice is made, because its consequences follow by necessity.[115] This rule is operational regardless of whether the myth is understood as describing prenatal selection of life forms, as a metaphor for the fundamental choice of a way of life, or even as a metaphor for the choices of our everyday experience. Once on board a plane to Baltimore, the passenger is 'fated' not to reach Singapore – but this is hardly rigid determinism. Besides, just as the passenger is at liberty to turn his flight into a miserable or positive experience, Plato allows for the exercise of freedom even within the pre-arranged model of life one has chosen.[116]

The last statement is controversial and requires further elaboration. In fact, Annas is not the only scholar who is worried by the Myth of Er's apparent deterministic note. Halliwell, for instance, expresses a similar criticism, albeit from a different viewpoint, i.e., from the perspective of an already embodied soul, for whom the 'fated' causal chain has been set in motion through the initial act of αἵρεσις, and is already fully operational: 'the more strictly we press the notion of a defining, prenatal life choice, the more we are confronted with a determinism that imperils the psychological, ethical, and political coherence of the rest of the *Republic*'.[117] It appears that Plato himself backs up this

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114 *Pace* Gonzales 2012, 265, who claims that the choice is not between virtue and vice, 'but between lives defined by accidental agglomerations of goods'. An analysis of the content of the choice is beyond the scope of this study, and Gonzalez is probably justified in claiming that to choose a happy life requires such complex and minute knowledge that it is almost impossible – provided he takes this concept to include external goods as well. However, if a soul focuses primarily on justice, the right choice may be more easily discernible. Besides, one must not forget that in the negative example of the soul who chose the life of a tyrant, (which Gonzalez amply exploits), the soul made its choice almost without deliberation. Therefore, it was its rashness, rather than the intricacy of the knowledge required, which ultimately led this soul to choose a life that included the terrible fate of cannibalism.

115 Cf. Alcinous' *Didascalicos*: 'But fate consists rather in the fact that if a soul chooses a given type of life and performs such-and-such actions, such-and-such consequences will follow for it' (tr. Dillon 1993, 35). Dillon 1993, 161 comments: 'Our own powers of decision are to be taken as [...] primary hypotheses of science such as geometry. What follows from these is fixed, or 'fated', but the principles are in our power to establish and observe or not'. This is what he calls 'a theory of 'conditional fate''. Proclus' position on this issue in *In Alc.* 146.6–14 and 292.18–293.1 seems to be quite similar. See O'Neill 1971, 95, 191.

116 Gonzales, who freely uses the phrase 'free choice', without dwelling much on its meaning (2012, 263, 273, 277, 278), asks: 'Does free choice exists only prior to this life and not at all during it?'. His answer seems to be affirmative on both points. Unlike Annas, he considers that freedom of choice is available to the souls in their pre-incarnational state, but that after entering the new body, '[t]his life appears ethically determined' (2012, 274) – an assertion that we shall attempt to disprove.

117 Halliwell 2007, 470.

worry since he claims that the soul's arrangement, rank, or character (τάξις) follows of necessity (δια το ἀνανκαίως) from the chosen life pattern (618b), which contains within itself every main state and situation which one will experience during his or her lifetime. According to Halliwell, this is difficult to reconcile with Socrates' first didactic intervention (618b–619a) in the third section of the Myth (617d–621a), where he emphasises the importance of a life-long philosophical training, through which the power to discern between the essential and the trivial, the good and the evil, can be acquired, i.e., where he urges Glaucon to become both learner and seeker, in a word, the moulder of his own character.[118]

The solution to this 'conundrum' – as Halliwell's calls it – is rather simple. Granted, in the opening to his address to the souls (617e2–4), Lachesis' prophet explicitly introduced two seemingly distinct, even contradictory, factors: determinism on the one hand, freedom on the other. While determinism is implied in the claim that every soul is to adhere to the life it chose *of necessity* (ᾧ συνέσται ἐξ ἀνάγκης, 617e2–3), the idea of freedom emerges from a somewhat enigmatic maxim. Yes, the soul is obligated to embrace the consequences of its choice, but *virtue has no master* (ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον, 617e3), and everyone will possess a greater or lesser degree of it, in proportion to how much they honour or disregard it.[119] The mention of necessity at this point is indeed problematic: even if the prenatal choice was autonomous, it nevertheless remains a single, isolated act which sets in motion a robust causal mechanism, which determines bodily appearance, mental states, and behaviour. As a result, we should be tied in a chain of determinism and unable to make independent decisions, or to carry out independent actions during the present life. Within such a life-model, there can be no space for free pursuit of justice, etc., and Halliwell's concern, therefore, seems justified.[120]

Despite the difficulties emphasised by Halliwell and other authors, Sorabji considers – rightly so – that this passage contains the earliest use of the

118 Inwood 2009, 43; McPherran 2010, 140; Stewart 1905, 170–171 and Thayer 1988, 372 also comment on this passage. McPherran especially shares Halliwell's concerns: '[t]he externals of the life one chooses [...] when allied to a particular sort of soul, *necessitate* a particular character-state that then *necessitates* the performance of an action that one ought not to perform'. Stewart, however, does not consider this to be problematic; on the contrary, he sees the episode as a confirmation of the soul's freedom and responsibility.

119 For a full list of the mentions of necessity (including the description of the three levels of predetermined limitations) and freedom in the Myth of Er, accompanied by a clear presentation of the controversy and by useful comments, see Wilberding 2013, 87–90.

120 For Plotinus' solution to the problem, see Remes 2007, 183–184.

metaphor of freedom.[121] Such a life, despite its numerous limitations, is a life of autonomy in the most important meaning of the word. After all, the acquired character *is* a matter of personal choice. Furthermore, if we step for a moment out of the mythical scenery, it is apparent in our everyday life that our choices are limited in many respects: we are not at liberty to decide on many crucial things, including our place of birth, physical features and conditions, intellectual capacity, the personality of our children, our neighbours, the time of our death. But to act rightly or wrongly, which is the ultimate freedom, remains under our control. As briefly pointed out above, every human action is preceded by an interplay of first and second-order desires, respectively embedded in the lower parts of the soul and in reason. The very existence of the process of reasoning, which usually culminates in judgments, and in consent or dissent, attests the privileged position of the rational part of the soul, and its innate ability to guide and lead the living entity.[122] Plato recognises that the truest expression of the soul's liberty lies in its ability to steer its longings towards self-improvement and, eventually, self-realisation. This process begins with the acquisition of virtue. Virtue, in its essence, is a type of knowledge – the knowledge of good and bad,[123] and of the standards imprinted on the rational soul.[124] Therefore, it may be learned and cultivated, and is available to any rational being, because it is inseparably connected to the very essence of the individual, i.e., to its νοῦς: 'for Plato reason is the core of virtue and at the same time the core of the real human being'.[125] It is available even to those who are not naturally interested in philosophy – who have not deliberately chosen a life of self-examination and pursuit of goodness – because men of true wisdom roam

121 See Sorabji 2004, 9.

122 'In the Platonic way of thinking, indorsing a proposition is not something that passively happens to the agent, but something in which he is actively involved […] Not only is reason described as the entity using the real power in the human being, it is also that part of the human being that has the strongest claim to selfhood', Remes 2007, 188.

123 See the account of courage in *Lach.* 194d–199e, esp. 199c, as well as Penner 1973, 60 and footnote 34; *Prt.* 332a–360d and 361b.

124 See p. 68 above.

125 Emilsson 2012, 365. In his analysis of Plotinus' position, Gerson 2007, 280 writes: 'Virtue is self-determining since it intellectualises the soul […]. Recognising the identity of soul and self, we may interpret this as indicating the self-identification with the second-order desire. This desire is the provenance of embodied intellect. Virtue intellectualises the soul because it disposes one to desire that which intellect determines is good'. The Middle Platonic answer is somewhat circular: virtue is free because a noble action would not be laudable if performed by instinct or under divine influence; see Dillon 1993, 41, 189. For a very similar argument in Proclus' *In Resp*., see Dillon 2015.

the earth and are eager to impart their wisdom, both through their written word, and through personal encounters.[126]

For this reason, Plato's Socrates wishes for us to meet someone who shall 'make us able and give us the knowledge to distinguish good life from a life of wickedness, and to always and in all circumstances choose the better one among the options available'.[127] Once acquired – either through one's independent reflection and effort[128] or through the exertions of enlightened 'missionaries'[129] – virtue can be exercised under any circumstance of human existence: a poor, sickly, or physically impaired person is free to cultivate virtue; and the possession of virtue, according to both Socrates and Plato, is the main prerequisite for true happiness. It has the power to break the chains of necessity and to grant a life of freedom – in its fullest and most significant meaning. Virtue is thus absolutely free: its practice is not subjected to the influence of any external circumstance or psychological constraint; it accompanies naturally the choice of a life of rationality – which, as an expression of our innermost self, is the prerogative of all individuals.

Following these considerations, the myth's determinism no longer contradicts Plato's assertion that moral responsibility and blame rest on the agent, and not on God. As such, the Myth of Er supports the characterisation of Plato not as a determinist, but rather as a libertarian.[130] Just as in the case of the soul's pre-incarnational choice, the necessary limitations mentioned by Plato are

126 More precisely, as already innate in every soul (in accordance with Plato's recollection theory: *Men.* 80d–86c, *Phd.* 72e–78b, *Phdr.* 246d–249d), knowledge, or virtue, needs only to be reawakened. The mission of Socrates and Plato in this world was to inspire and to help humanity to achieve this goal. This ideal finds its full embodiment in the Ancient Indian spiritual practices, through the figures of the wandering Hindu religious mendicant (*praivrājaka*), and the Buddhist saint (*bodhisattva*), whose only duties are to attain enlightenment, and to enlighten the misguided humanity in return, interfering thus in the individuals' respective karmas.

127 ποιήσει δυνατὸν καὶ ἐπιστήμονα, βίον καὶ χρηστὸν καὶ πονη ρὸν διαγιγνώσκοντα, τὸν βελτίω ἐκ τῶν δυνατῶν ἀεὶ πανταχοῦ αἱρεῖσθαι, 618c4–6. This may be one of the instances in which chance or luck (τύχη, see, e.g., 619d7) is required, justifying its appearance in the myth: some individuals, in order to meet a philosopher without any effort on their part, require the assistance of luck.

128 Proclus, *In Alc*. 162.9–12: 'Those who possess a more elevated nature somehow rise superior to the tumult of the world of process and transfer to the more refined emotions; then indeed they can be more easily ordered by reason and become obedient to knowledge' (tr. O'Neill 1971, 107). See also *In Alc*. 224–225.

129 *In Alc*. 225.18–20: 'since the more perfect souls are more inventive, while the less perfect stand in greater need of help from without' (tr. O'Neill 1971, 148).

130 With this addendum: as already mentioned, the agent is free as far as he or she lets τὸ λογιστικόν rule their entire being. Otherwise, all the consequences of their initial choice

contingent upon the soul's failure to respect and seek virtue, i.e., knowledge,[131] which is, unlike external assets, available to any soul wishing to pursue it.[132]

In light of the aforesaid, it seems reasonable to state that, as far as the Myth of Er is concerned, the threat of determinism does not necessarily hamper the exercise of freedom of choice neither prior to, nor during the particular embodiment.

2.4.3 *Infinite Regress of Accountability?*

The problem of determinism has a further, deeper aspect, already suggested in Halliwell's statement. Not only is the soul's fate sealed by a single prenatal, even if immediate, unrestricted choice; that choice itself is already informed by the experiences and habits acquired in the previous earthly life. Plato clearly conveys this idea in his descriptions of the decisions made by Orpheus, Ajax, or Odysseus.[133] Thus emerges the dreadful threat of infinite regress 'of states of moral responsibility, since every choice of life springs from the character of a soul whose condition is the result of the consequences of its presumably constrained prior choice, and so on'.[134]

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follow by necessity and tie them in the chain of predetermined states and events. Thus, freedom and determinism in the Myth of Er do not converge, but exclude each other.

131 That is to say, if a person leading a tyrant's life eventually adopted virtue, he would not drastically alter his ways, i.e., he would remain in office. However, this person might turn from unscrupulous oppressor to an enlightened leader, as perhaps Cleobolus, Pittacus or Periander were.

132 A very interesting approach to this issue is found in Porphyry's *On What is in Our Power*. His 'rather ingenious reply to [the] *aporia*' of the compatibility of the myth's statements promoting necessity on the one hand and freedom of choice on the other, focuses on the distinction 'between two senses of 'life' (*bios*) and thus two choices of life that each individual soul must make', Wilberding 2013, 90–91. The first choice of life is made in the disembodied state and refers only to selecting a species and gender. This choice binds the chooser to the selected option with strong necessity. The second choice of life (whether it is also performed in the disembodied state or after the incarnation remains unclear), which pertains mostly to selecting a profession and ethical outlooks, is characterised by a high degree of autonomy. Wilberding's fine exposition and learned defence of Porphyry's approach is compelling, to the exception of a significant flaw: the main (and only) textual evidence from the *Republic* that Porphyry produces in support of his thesis (620d7–e4, see Wilberding 2013, 96) is an interpretation of the passage in question rather than direct evidence. Had the idea of two lives been Plato's main line of defence of freedom of choice, he would have probably emphasised it, or at least stated it explicitly.

133 620a–d. See p. 54 above.

134 McPherran 2010, 137. Inwood 2009, 44 states the problem even more explicitly: 'Does the myth allow any genuinely free choice within a life, or are all soul's choices determined in advance by its choice of life in the underworld, a choice that is itself determined by its choices in its preceding life, and so on indefinitely?'. Dorter 2003, 130 expresses the same

In this regard, three important points need to be emphasised and carefully considered. Firstly, contrary to McPherran's claim, Plato does not explicitly state that *every* choice of life is influenced by previous experiences. He lends Socrates words that are less emphatic and final than some critics suggest: κατὰ συνήθειαν γὰρ τοῦ προτέρου βίου τὰ πολλὰ αἱρεῖσθαι (620a2–3), i.e., not every, but *most of the souls* made their choice on the basis of habits acquired in a previous life.[135] From this, one can easily deduce that not only is it possible for a soul to make a right choice, but that some souls *de facto* do make a right choice, prompted neither by their previously acquired character, nor by the distractions offered by heavenly pleasures, but guided solely by considerations of virtue and by the ability to discern between good and evil.[136]

Secondly, the ἀρετὴ ἀδέσποτον formula suggests that virtue, on its own merit, has the power to promote those who exercise it, as much as vice has the power to demote.[137] And virtue is not fated, but free – it must be consciously adopted or rejected. Acquiring virtue, and consequently a fulfilled and happy life, results from the exercise of the capacity to make rational choices, which is the prerogative of each individual. All inherited traits may be overcome in this way. Epictetus, for example, despite his humble circumstances, still chose a life of philosophical education that brought him excellence in virtue and high renown. In keeping with the myth, all his previous choices, beneficial or not, all the limitations imposed on him by low birth and crippling circumstances, were conquered and overturned by his adherence to a life of virtue, which

concern: 'Our choice of a particular life entails the choice of a particular character (618b), but any choice we make is already determined by our present character, so if we chose our character we must do so on the basis of the character we already have, and there seems to be an infinite regress'.

135 In a demythologised version: 'most of the individual's choices spring from his or her already acquired character'. A very similar concept is discernible behind Socrates' words at 619d: *not a few* (οὐκ ἐλάττους, 619d1) of those who made wrong choices were spoiled by their pleasurable experiences in heaven (i.e., improvement is possible, despite the spiritually non-stimulating circumstances), while *most of those* (τούς πολλούς, 619d4) who came from below the earth made better choices (i.e., to falter and fall is possible, despite the lessons learned).

136 Plato's belief in the liberating power of rational choice, sustained by knowledge or wisdom, is apparent throughout the myth. See, e.g., 618c5–6: τὸν βελτίω ἐκ τῶν δυνατῶν ἀεὶ πανταχοῦ αἱρεῖσθαι – 'to choose the best of all possible options, always and everywhere'; 618d6: συλλογισάμενον αἱρεῖσθαι – 'to choose logically'; 619b3–4: ξὺν νῷ ἑλομένῳ – 'provided one chooses rationally'; 619d8: εἴ ... ὑγιῶς φιλσοφοῖ – 'if one philosophises soundly'; 621a7–8: τοὺς δὲ φρονήσει μὴ σῳζομένους – 'those who are not saved by wisdom'.

137 Cf. *Phdr.* 248e4–5: Of the embodied souls in this world, the one who lived its lives justly will change to a better fate (ὃς μὲν ἂν δικαίως διαγάγῃ ἀμείνονος μοίρας μεταλαμβάνει) in the next life, the one who lived unjustly, to a worse (ὃς δ' ἂν ἀδίκως, χείρονος).

alone was enough to secure true happiness, as well as the external rewards that, according to Socrates (*Resp.* 612c–614a), await the righteous man.

Thirdly, what is here considered as infinite regress is, in fact, not so. Plato's later dialogues contain two slightly different, but still compatible, accounts of the 'original fall'. In *Timaeus* 41e–42e, all souls are granted, before their reincarnation, the full knowledge of the universe, and an equal start as a male human; where their first incarnate existence leads them – back to the companion star, or to a different, possibly 'lower' form of life – is solely determined by their own choices, and by their dedication to the practice of virtue. Unfortunately, most of them are misled by the snares of ignorance, and become trapped in the cycle of transmigration. *Phaedrus* 246a–248e – leaving aside the iconography of the myth – offers a similar conception, with the difference that Socrates specifies nine classes of male human existence available to a soul at its first incarnation. They range from philosopher to tyrant, and depend on the soul's ability to perceive more or less of the transcendent world of Forms above. Thus, besides the possibility of free agency in the exercise of knowledge and virtue during each life as a human being, Plato also describes an initial stage, unaffected by any previous choice, and from which every soul begins its journey in the physical world. The responsibility for the decisions made in the course of this first lifetime rests on the individual alone; and although these decisions shape the unfolding of the individual's fate, responsibility can indeed ultimately, and often, easily, be traced back to the same individual. This should suffice as an answer to the objection that, in the Myth of Er, the challenges of determinism and regress of choice prevent moral responsibility from being attributed to the agent.[138]

2.4.4 *Further Objections Addressed*

Plato's endorsement of the theory of reincarnation, both in the Myth of Er and in his philosophy in general, is another, closely related, problem. Annas considers this concept 'implausible, and even grotesque',[139] while Thayer believes that it contradicts the moral argument of the *Republic*.[140]

138 For a slightly different solution to the problem, see Dorter 2003, 136–138. For an alternative interpretation of the regress problem, see Wilberding 2013, 103–104.

139 Annas 1982, 138. Surprisingly, Annas 1982, 137 provides a lengthy quotation from St. Augustine to support her views, although a devout Christian theologian's approach to the issue of reincarnation could hardly be unbiased or objective. For a concise but acute critique of Annas' views on reincarnation in the myth, see Johnson 1999, 4–5. See also Hackforth's more nuanced perspective on reincarnation in 1952, 85–91.

140 Thayer 1988, 379. According to her interpretation, were it true that we live through an endless succession of lives we choose, Thrasymachus, for example, could opt for moral

Nevertheless, aside from the almost dogmatic dissatisfaction with it, one can raise some more pertinent objections to the employment of the theory of reincarnation in the myth and its relation to the idea of moral responsibility, crucial for Plato's defence of God's benevolence. The most serious of these objections challenges the notion of the individual's moral responsibility for his or her actions – considerably influenced by the activities and experiences from previous lives – by positing a discontinuity of the agent's personal identity. According to Annas, 'a conviction that the responsibility for my character and actions does not go back to me and then stop, but can be traced in large part to previous lives which I do not remember is bound to undercut the feeling that *I* am responsible for what *I* have done'.[141] The absence of remembrance of the actions whose consequences we are suffering or enjoying is also problematic for Thayer: 'Thus there is neither memory or any other vital connection binding the sequence of lives'.[142]

The problem of memory loss can manifest in at least two forms: first, it could be deemed unfair to hold an individual responsible of something to which he or she has no connection, because it happened in a different environment and under different circumstances, and of which he or she has no recollection. Second, if one has forgotten all the pleasures and pains of previous existences, and is about to forget the experiences of the present life, including one's own perceived identity, there could be no substantial reason to worry about the lot that will befall one's soul in its future existences.

The difficulty raised by the first aspect of the memory loss problem has, in fact, no incidence on the issue of preservation of identity and responsibility, as it will be submitted shortly. Besides, it is important to note that the cycle of transmigration, as presented in the Myth of Er, does not imply an absolute loss of memory. While in the interim state between two embodiments the soul vividly remembers the events experienced in its previous life, and the prospect

experimentation: he could persist with his life of injustice in the present existence, and allow himself to try Socrates' recommendation in a future life. However, it is unlikely that Plato would allow the possibility for Thrasymachus to have such an option, because, as intimated in the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus*, and *Laws*, a wrongdoer is destined to descend lower and lower on the scale of life forms and conditions. One may only escape this chain of causal determination by embracing virtue. The prenatal choices, after all, are strongly influenced by the experiences and the mentality acquired in the previous life; therefore, it seems unlikely that a soul into whom ignorance has been ingrained for so long would eventually choose a life of virtue for the sake of 'moral experimentation'.

141 Annas 1982, 132.

142 Thayer 1988, 378.

that it may remember other past lives is not excluded either.[143] Furthermore, Plato allows for the possibility that some recollections both of the previous life and of the interim state may be retained even in this life, as long as one drinks moderately from the River of Forgetfulness.[144]

As far as the punishments and rewards in the Myth of Er are concerned, whether a soul remembers its deeds or not is actually irrelevant; the complex cosmic mechanism that involves δαίμονες, judges, goddesses, and finally Necessity herself ensures the proper and just distribution of good and bad among the souls.[145] Even in the present life, a criminal may suffer from amnesia and be unable to recognise or establish any connections with past actions; such a loss of memory, however, will not exempt him from responsibility for his actions, as long as there is an official system to record them and demand retribution.[146]

Moreover, objections such as this are undermined by their assumption of the verbal and conceptual separation of the 'I' and 'me' from the soul undergoing transmigration. These objections suggest that the present 'I' cannot be held responsible for something that the soul did in one of its previous incarnations. The intricacies of the problems of personhood and persistence of personal identity, discussed in contemporary metaphysics, are beyond the scope of the present study. Still, it is highly unlikely that Plato would recognise the above objection as valid since he holds that the soul *is* the 'I', or the

143 See Inwood 2009, 34.

144 'So, for every soul it is necessary to drink some measure of the water, but those who are not saved by wisdom drink more than the measure, and such a drinker always forgets everything' (621a7–b2). Therefore, those who are saved by wisdom, e.g., those who read the *Republic* or heard the myth, might drink less and thus retain some memory of their past lives. Plato might have had the examples of Pythagoras' and Empedocles' alleged reminiscences in mind.

145 Keping 2009, 287 highlights the similarity between Plato's doctrine of metempsychosis and post-mortem reward and punishment, and 'the Buddhist doctrines of *samsara* and *karma*'. However, these two doctrines do not fully overlap. Unlike Plato's, the Buddhist theory does not include a self that underlines thoughts and sensations. In this regard, Buddha is quite Humean: while he accepts the *saṁsāra* as a cycle of births and deaths, he does not recognise a soul – only a continuity of causally connected 'mental states'. Thus, the law of *karma* does not preside over the transmigration of soul-substance from one body to another, but over the causal shaping of the ensuing life by the preceding (see, e.g., Chatterjee and Datta 1984, 135–138; Hiriyanna 1993, 138–141).

146 Someone may object that, while this principle is indeed observed in the courtroom, legal matters should not be confused with the philosophical question of personal identity. We should, however, keep in mind that Plato himself uses legal terminology when speaking of the implementation of universal justice by the gods in the Myth of Er and in *Laws* 904d–905b, and therefore it seems acceptable to acknowledge that, at least in Plato's case, legal analogies are applicable to the issue of moral responsibility over multiple lifetimes.

self, as his Socrates explicitly argues in *Alcibiades* I,[147] and as the Timaean story of the Demiurge fashioning and instructing the immortal souls suggests (41d–42e). These souls are depicted as rational, and as clearly individualised selves;[148] the Demiurge allows them to contemplate the vision of the nature of the universe, and instructs them about the laws of destiny, the difficulties they will encounter, and the options available to them. The Demiurge's does all that in order to establish the individual soul's moral responsibility for the failings and misfortune it might experience,[149] as well as to exculpate himself from any future blame.[150] Whether Plato is right or wrong, he considers us as rational, immortal souls,[151] and the rational and immortal nature of the soul is the very criterion of persistence of personal identity.[152] As such, as far as the issue of persistence of identity through time is concerned, Plato may be

147 See *Alc.* I 128a–130c, especially 129e–130c. Although some scholars now consider this dialogue as spurious, for the Ancient Platonist it represented the first rung of the Platonic curriculum's ladder, and its teachings certainly do not swerve from the spirit of orthodox Platonism.

148 '[B]y the one-one assignment to stars he gives each to know that it is a separate self, one of human plurality but not the plurality of a herd', Broadie 2012, 101–102.

149 'By telling each soul all these things, he lets each know that it is to be a responsible agent, and in this way he primes it for the actual assumption of responsibility', Broadie 2012, 102.

150 ἵνα τῆς ἔπειτα εἴη κακίας ἑκάστων ἀναίτιος, (*Tim.* 42d3–4), an echo of the Myth's θεὸς ἀναίτιος.

151 At the risk of emphasising the obvious, let us mention some other passages in the dialogues where Plato expresses this idea of his quite clearly. The image of the disembodied souls of the Myth of Er, carrying with them in their post-mortem state the impressions, memories and identity of their previous life, speaks loudly enough in favour of this understanding. Next, there is the argument for the immortality of the soul, and the simile of the sea-god Glaucus (*Resp.* 608b–612a). The *Phaedo*, almost in its entirety (Socrates' profound, somewhat cryptic, but also witty remarks addressed to Evenus are especially significant: 'I am departing today, as it seems' (61c1), 'so tell Evenus ... if he is wise, to follow me as quickly as possible' (61b7–8), and to his followers: '[you may bury me] said he, in whichever way you wish, provided you manage to catch me, and I do not escape you' (115c4–5), and: 'Crito, said he, we owe a cock to Asclepius' (118a7–8)). See also *Phaedrus* (246a–250c), especially 250c4–6: '[us] being pure and not entombed in this which we presently carry round and designate as 'body''; *Timaeus* 90e–91c; *Laws* 959a6–b1: 'what makes each of us what he is, is nothing else but the soul, while the body is an appearance which follows each of us', etc. Therefore, for Plato, the soul is the self, i.e., it constitutes the personhood of each living entity. In Gerson's words: 'Socrates [in the Phaedo] believes that persons are souls. [...] Socrates must be presuming that a person's interest must be psychic, because a soul is what person is. If a person is a soul, then it follows that his or her body is a possession', Gerson 2000, 232.

152 'Immortal intelligence is the principle of identity in souls: this soul is the very same soul that it is, whatever else may happen to it and whatever other qualities and capacities it may acquire, just in case it is or hosts *just this* particular intelligence', Carpenter 2008, 11.

counted among the Anticriterialists, or the advocates of the so-called Simple View.[153] Succinctly expressed,

> The simple view of diachronic personal identity holds that personal identity is not constituted by continuities of mental or physical properties or of the physical stuff (that is, the bodily matter) of which they are made, but is a separate feature of the world from any of the former, although of course it is compatible with personal identity being caused by such continuities.[154]

Ergo objections drawn from physiologicalism or psychologicalism – change of body, Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde scenarios, loss of memory, complete amnesia, etc. – are not receivable in the case of Plato. Although in many such cases several 'I's' may be attached to the same soul, both in a single life and over various lives, Plato's general psychological and metaphysical conceptions are different. He is an essentialist in his conception of individuality, and so for him the frequent alteration of empirical 'selves' does not endanger the persistence of personal identity. If a previously human soul reincarnates as an animal, this animal will display no visible connection with its former 'I'. But the same soul gives life to this animal, as was previously giving life to the human being. Furthermore, the soul is imprisoned in that particular animal body because of specific failures to make proper use of the opportunities offered by human life[155] – which shows that the responsibility for the actions performed in one lifetime follows the soul into the next. And if the active and the passive entity in every subsequent incarnation is indeed *one and the same self* – accidentally equipped with different bodies, as a man wears now one robe, now another – the natural conclusion must be that this very self is to be held responsible for both just and wicked deeds, *throughout the spectrum of embodied existences*.

153 The other two main views being the Psychological and the Physiological view. According to the former, the criterion of survival through changes is the preservation of some mental features, such as memories and beliefs; according to the latter, the criterion is preservation of the biological organism that constitutes a person. For an overview of the debate, the main problems involved, and further references, see Olson 2021.

154 Swinburne 2012, 105. This article contains a very clear exposition and defence of the Simple View. Unsurprisingly, Swinburne 2012, 120 holds that this 'separate feature of the world' which constitutes and preserves personal identity is 'a soul'. However, unlike Plato, he believes that it is 'a human soul'.

155 *Timaeus* 91d–92c ascribes the very creation of the lower life forms to the human being's inability to properly pursue philosophy and the true goal of life.

Finally, a few words on the second form in which the problem of memory loss can manifest. As hinted above, one may suggest that the future tribulations of the soul are of no concern for the present empirical 'I', since they will occur when no trace of this present 'I' is left. This approach misses out the true purport of Socrates' final and most important precept in the *Phaedo*. The true aim of philosophy is to learn how to die properly (*Phd.* 64a), i.e., to attain the unembodied state of freedom from the shackles of corporeality. This accomplishment is achieved through the affirmation of one's real identity. In common parlance, or by convention, we use the expression 'my soul', as if we possessed a soul, but in reality – Plato might say – we *are* this soul, and the body belongs to it. Thus, to claim that I have nothing to do with what is going to become of my soul, because nothing of the person I presently am will survive the end of this phase of the transmigration cycle, is to shy away irresponsibly from the gravest concern I should have: the concern for the freedom and happiness of my true self. It is tantamount to living one's life only for the moment, like a child convinced that they will never grow up and be obligated to assume any responsibility.[156]

At the close of this last section of Chapter 2, it is to be hoped that enough arguments have been provided to support the thesis that the concept of moral accountability in the Myth of Er is not seriously endangered by the objections of determinism, infinite regress and non-persistence of personal identity, and, consequently, to corroborate Plato's succinct Solution from Personal Responsibility in *Republic* X.

2.5 Closing Remarks

Chapter 1 suggested that the story of Plato's theodicy begins with the denial of the very possibility of God's involvement with any kind of evil in *Republic* II, implying that God is not responsible for human suffering and tribulations. This last proposition is reaffirmed in the closing myth of the *Republic*, and the responsibility for evil is attributed to the individual moral agents and their free choice. In *Republic* II, 370c6–7, Plato may be referring to the unidentified causes of evil in the plural because the moral agents of *Republic* X are multiple.

The conception of human freedom and ensuing responsibility presented in the last book of the *Republic* and its famous Myth of Er is rather complex. The individual's state of being in this life, and in the next, is an amalgam of three

156 For a different take on the problem of reincarnation and memory loss, see Inwood 2009, 33–35.

factors: ἀνάγκη (necessity), τύχη (chance), and αἵρεσις (choice).[157] Ἀνάγκη is a personification of the unalterable rational constitution of the cosmos and of its laws of order, while τύχη most likely stands for the inexplicable randomness of everyday events; through it, Plato highlights the undefined, but indisputably operational luck or chance which produces the contingencies of life. These may hinder, but not wholly thwart the endeavours of those of noble character: even in an unpredictable, difficult situation, one may still pursue justice and find, or preserve, happiness, albeit at the cost of a greater effort. In other words, τύχη's undeniable influence does not significantly compromise the status of αἵρεσις, which remains the primary decisional factor. The act of choice-making is essentially free, and its consequences are justly bestowed, since it remains unaffected by the threats of determinism, the infinite regress of moral responsibility, or the discontinuity of personal identity. Besides the external constraints and restrictions imposed by ἀνάγκη and τύχη, the soul's αἵρεσις is also subjected to inner limitations: the allurements of heavenly pleasures that charm the soul and weaken its judgment (619c–d), the strong influence of the previous life's experiences and habits (620a–d), and the two types of ignorance: 'ignorance of the details of the life that it has failed to notice and ignorance of the effects of the life on itself'.[158] However, all these factors are ultimately reducible to the ignorance of good and bad arising from the neglect of philosophy, as Socrates explains in his first instructional intervention of the myth (618b–619a), and confirms in the second (619d–e). And since this ignorance is caused by the soul's own failure to develop wisdom, the blame and the responsibility can only belong to the soul itself. We suggest calling this Platonic theodicy the Solution from Personal Responsibility; it is the ancestor of the famous Free-Will Defence, belonging to a time when the concept of the will was not yet an item on the philosophical agenda.

Thus, Plato's theodicean strategy for transferring the accountability for the badness we experience from God to the individual moral agent may be assessed

157 Plutarch in *Quaest. conv*. 740 B–D, referring to the relevant passages of the Myth of Er, also identifies three causes for life's fortunes and misfortunes: εἱμαρμένη, τύχη and τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν (destiny, chance and what is up to us). εἱμαρμένη may easily be connected with the divine Ἀνάγκη of the Myth, as Plutarch himself suggests at 740 D4, through the phrase εἱμαρμένης ἀνάγκῃ, 'with the compulsion of destiny'. He is convinced that the chief cause is τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν, by which our choices of virtue or vice are governed. Destiny's role is to ensure that good and bad choices are implemented in reality, while chance encompasses all accidental events that do not fall within the purview of free choice and destiny. Cf. *Leg*. 709b7–c1 where the Athenian Stranger states that human affairs are managed primarily by God, but also by chance (τύχη), opportune moment (καῖρος), and skills (τέχνη) as the fourth factor.

158 Inwood 2009, 44.

as successful, so far as that is possible. The responsibility is upon the one that chooses, while God remains exempt from blame. However, this understanding could give rise to a different issue, i.e., to the problematic conception of God as too indifferent or distant. From the myth's perspective, Socrates' earlier claim that, while unaccountable for the bad, God is still responsible for the good things that happen to humans (*Resp*. 379b7–8), looks like a mere statement of piety, and not an expression of factual state of affairs. Ours appears to be the responsibility for *everything* we experience. The deities of the Myth of Er are no more than indifferent observers and dispensers of justice, since they do not manifest any good intentions or compassion towards humans. They are but curators of the impersonal law and order of the Universe, of which the purpose is not elucidated. Therein reigns λόγος, personified by the goddess Necessity, which, within the confines of the myth, is something predetermined by the cosmic laws, and not put in action by a benevolent power. Striving to establish that God is guiltless, Plato has brought his argument to the limit.

A further problem may be identified: although it is fair to say that the gods in the myth are absolved from the responsibility for the particular evils experienced by each individual during their earthly existence – since those are, after all, a matter of one's own choice – they are not absolved from the responsibility for evil *tout court*. Indeed, evils are available *to be chosen* by the souls. To overcome this difficulty and produce a more viable theodicy, Plato will have to conjure up again the benevolent deities of *Republic* II, and identify a possible source for human ignorance and for physical evils; such a source would be the ultimate origin of both moral evil, and of the tribulations caused by natural events. He will duly undertake these tasks in his later dialogues, most notably in the *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus*, and the *Laws*.

CHAPTER 3

Theodicy in the *Theaetetus*?

The *Theaetetus* may seem to be a peculiar choice of text for conducting inquiries in Platonic theodicy or theology, since it is predominantly an epistemological dialogue: περὶ ἐπιστήμης is its traditional subtitle, and its main focus is to inquire into the question 'What is knowledge?'.[1] Indeed, most of Plato's reflections on evil and on its (in)compatibility with the existence of a good God occur elsewhere. While the *Republic*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Laws* contain Plato's crucial theodicean passages, his theory of evil and of its origins emerges most pertinently from the cosmological account of the *Timaeus*, from the great myth of the *Politicus* 268d–276e, and from the *Laws* x section on the causal priority of the soul, which includes mentions of a bad, irrational ψυχή operational in the cosmos (896c–898c). And yet, the acknowledgement of the impossibility to eradicate evil in the mortal sphere in *Theaetetus* 176a5–8, although succinct, is not less important in this regard. As a matter of fact, Plotinus and Proclus made the passage one of the starting points of their own struggles with the problem of evil. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the two clauses on evil in *Theaetetus* 176a5–8, and to suggest a theodicy related to them. In other words, on the pages that follow we shall extract some theodicean ideas from the passage 176a–177c, which conveys Socrates' thoughts about evil. To start with, section 3.1 will introduce the famous Digression on the philosopher's life (*Theaetetus* 172b–177c), and will put its theological and theodicean statements into the perspective of their broader context. Section 3.2 will address Socrates' reflections on evil in *Theaetetus* 176a5–8, where the seeds of the dialogues' theodicy are sown, and suggest that there two opposite principles are postulated, one of which is the cause of good, the other the cause of evil. In support of this assumptions, the following propositions will be examined: (a) the word 'good' at 176a6 refers to Plato's highest entity – αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν; (b) τὰ κακά of 176a5 are not to be considered as the opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν in the same line; (c) ὑπεναντίον (176a6), the subordinated opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν, and the second ἀνάγκη in the passage (176a8) may refer to the same entity, i.e., the Timaean

1 See Socrates' programmatic statements: 'Well, exactly this is what I am puzzled about and cannot grasp satisfactorily on my own: what on earth knowledge happens to be' – τοῦτ' αὐτὸ τοίνυν ἐστὶν ὃ ἀπορῶ καὶ οὐ δύναμαι λαβεῖν ἱκανῶς παρ' ἐμαυτῷ, ἐπιστήμη ὅτι ποτὲ τυγχάνει ὄν, 145e8–9; 'to discern what on earth knowledge itself is' – γνῶναι ἐπιστήμην αὐτὸ ὅτι ποτ' ἐστίν, 146e9–10.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004679306_005

Necessity. Finally, section 3.3 explores the claims and ideas that perhaps justify a theodicean reading of the Digression's relevant passages.

3.1 Setting the Scene: the *Theaetetus* Digression

As already mentioned, *Theaetetus* 176a–177c contains an outline – although perhaps not overtly explicit – of another attempt by Plato to justify the ways of God in the face of evil. This passage occurs midway through the dialogue, in a part which Socrates concludes by calling it a digression from the main flow of the argument.[2] The famous *Theaetetus* Digression unfolds in the course of Socrates' discussion of the 'Knowledge is sense perception' thesis, which is young Theaetetus' first answer to the central question of the dialogue (151d–186e). The immediate context of the Digression is the more accurate restatement of Protagoras' *homo mensura* doctrine, this time as pertaining not only to perception but also to judgement, and its second rebuttal. Socrates first presents Protagoras' own supposed defence of his doctrine. Its most important aspect is the confirmation of the fundamental tenet that each individual's perceptions and judgments are indeed true – because the cogniser perceives them as such – now strengthened by the further claim that, the stated fact notwithstanding, some true perceptions and judgements concerning the same things or states are better than others (*Tht.* 165e–168c). This addition pre-empts the objection that, if man were the measure of what is true and what not, it would be impossible to establish any standard of expertise, or to distinguish a wiseman from a fool.

Then Socrates, immediately before the beginning of the Digression, offers his second refutation of Protagoras (*Tht.* 169d–172b). He focuses on the aforementioned premise, already accepted by the imaginary Protagoras, that some individuals are wiser than others, at least in matters supposed to bring present and future benefits. Thus, even a Protagorean would acknowledge that, although most things are as they appear to the individual, some issues require expert opinion, i.e., are objectively better known and performed by certain classes of people, who are generally recognised as experts, and are the preferred agents in the given cases. To illustrate the idea that some people are objectively wise regarding certain subjects (on account of true thinking) and some are ignorant (owing to false judgement), Socrates compares two pairs of judgements: those concerning sensations with those concerning bodily health,

2 'But let us now depart from these matters, since they represent a digression' – περὶ μὲν οὖν τούτων, ἐπειδὴ καὶ πάρεργα τυγχάνει λεγόμενα, ἀποστῶμεν, 177b7–8.

and those concerning values with those concerning social wellbeing. In the case of ordinary physical sensations, such as the taste of food or the warmth of a meal, each individual is indeed the measure of the truth of their judgement, whereas matters of bodily health require the superior opinion of an expert physician. Similarly, while no citizen may be wiser than another in selecting commendable, just, or pious courses of action, since there is no unanimous opinion in these matters, decisions concerning the overall advantage or disadvantage of the state are entrusted to the most adept in such matters, and the objectivity of their success or failure is easily observable.[3]

The discussion presented in the Digression is triggered by this affirmation of the conventional nature of virtues and values.[4] Such understanding is certainly unappealing for Plato, who considers that the commendable, the just, the pious, etc., are absolute values. However, instead of arguing directly in favour of his position – an enterprise that threatens to entangle the interlocutors in 'a larger discourse arising from the smaller one' (172b8) – Plato utilises the Digression itself as a tacit argument against the relativity of moral values thesis.[5] But there is more to it, as the following three points will suffice to demonstrate. The proper Platonic way of ascribing objective value to justice or piety is the appeal to the theory of Forms, a step to which Plato in all probability resorts there, although far from overtly.[6] Two other striking features of the Digression are Plato's original formulation of his far-reaching exhortation to become as similar to God as possible (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, 176b1–2), and the brief comment on the nature of evil (176a5–8), with all its consequences.

The Digression opens with Socrates' exposition of the differences between the philosopher committed to intellectual pursuits and the counsellor who frequents law-courts (172c3–176a2). The former often displays traits of social awkwardness or dysfunctionality but remains a free man in the real sense of

3 Cornford 1935, 81 briefly elucidates Socrates' claim regarding the superiority of the physician and the able stateman. The arguments presented in *Tht*. 169d–172b precede the final refutation of Protagoras' defence in *Tht*. 177c–d. This refutation rests on the points already made: the 'man the measure' doctrine cannot stand since there are people who claim to know how others should act for their own benefit, and who are able – on the basis of their superior knowledge – to predict more accurately future events and situations.

4 Cornford 1935, 82–83 proposes a different interpretation of the short introduction to the Digression (172b2–c1), and suggests that Plato, instead of responding to the previous claim regarding the relative nature of virtues, is introducing a new doctrine, even more Protagorean than Protagoras'.

5 'Plato offers no formal refutation of these claims, but it would seem that the main point of the digression is to make it clear that he sharply disagrees', Bostock 1988, 98.

6 How else should a Platonist argue that goodness, justice, piety, etc., exist by nature, and not by convention only?

the world. He has sufficient σχολή for pursuing an argument of his choice without any time limitation, just like Socrates and his interlocutors. In addition, his efforts are not aimed at merely satisfying the bare necessities of life, but at investigating things that really are and as they really are – especially the lofty concepts of justice, happiness, and the like. The law-court speaker, on the contrary, is well adapted to society, but also characterised by his slavish attitude, because he is obligated to please his addressees, and has to concentrate his mental powers on speeches concerned with the accusation or defence of some other slave. He is a flatterer who seeks to please the jurymen and refute the opponents whose patience is very limited; thus, he must operate within strict time constrains. All this forces him to focus only on the petty particulars of everyday pleasures and pains, and to disregard the true purpose of human life.[7] These descriptions of the philosopher's and counsellor's ways of life and states of mind also serve to highlight the difference between the objects of their interests – perpetual and admirable for the former, transitory and futile for the latter. This obviously corresponds to Plato's two orders of reality – Being and Becoming.

Having heard the discourse on the philosopher, Theodorus the geometrician – who is Theaetetus' teacher and one of the dialogue's dramatis personae – agrees wholeheartedly with what has been said, and expresses his belief that, were also the people in general convinced by Socrates' words, there would be more peace and less evil among men. On that notice, Socrates utters the sentence(s) which are of the utmost significance for the attempts to grasp Plato's views on the problem of evil, and to which we shall return shortly:[8] 'But it is not possible, Theodorus, that evil should be destroyed – for there must always be something opposed to the good: nor it is possible that it should have its seat in heaven. But it must inevitably haunt human life, and prowl about

7 This comparison brings to mind the contrast between the rhetor and the philosopher drawn in the *Gorgias*. The description of the philosopher's clumsy behaviour in the court of law (*Tht*. 174c) is reminiscent of Callicles' warning that, if unjustly charged, Socrates would be ineffective as a defender against the plaintiffs (*Grg.* 486a). Both these *loci* may be interpreted as allusions to his imminent death. Socrates of the *Theaetetus* is, after all, bound to the στοά of the King Archon, to meet Meletus' accusation (*Tht*. 210d).

8 The very fact that Theodorus' rather general statement receives such an energetic and specific response may indicate that Plato hopes to arouse his reader's curiosity because he has something important to add – albeit in only a few words. The austerity of the expression, however, is deceptive: 'What is being said in a Platonic dialogue must be watched most carefully: every word counts; some casually spoken words may be more important than lengthy, elaborate statements' Klein 1977, 2.

this earth'.[9] However, besides highlighting the burden which accompanies human existence, Socrates also advises those who desire to free themselves from evil to escape from here thither, to the heavenly region. Such an escape is the only way to conquer evil, and it may only be effected by becoming as similar to God as possible: φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν (176b1–2). Since God is the paradigm of goodness, emulating him can be achieved by perfecting one's morality. According to the well-known Socratic tenet, virtuous life is possible only for those who have acquired wisdom; in the *Theaetetus*, moral perfection and the resemblance with God are identified with the act, or process, of becoming just and pious through wisdom: ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι (176b2–3). Plato's motivation behind the choice of these two particular virtues is rather clear – they had been already mentioned at 172b3 as examples of values that were, according to Protagoras and other thinkers (172b6–7), subjective and relative.

Hence, in the rest of the Digression (176b–177c) Plato elaborates on two related topics. Firstly, he draws a distinction between the civic and philosophical types of wisdom and justice.[10] The civic type relies on the conventions that underpin human interactions, and is often used by pretentious persons to impress others (176b3–8, 176c6–d1). The philosophical type arises through μίμησις of the perfect paradigm and yields genuine goodness (176b8–c5). Secondly, and more importantly, he contrasts the fate of the virtuous and of the wicked, both in this world and in the other. A practitioner of distorted civic virtue belongs among the wicked, for such virtue inevitably degrades into plain ignorance. Thus, when all is said and done, two opposite kinds of existence may be identified in this world: one of wisdom and virtue,[11] the other of ignorance and wickedness.[12] The first results in a depraved life on earth and forbids access to the pure realm after death. The second, sustained by philosophical virtue and justice, produces the opposite life and outcomes. Therefore, real justice, wisdom, etc., are absolute values, since they are firmly grounded in the divine paradigm, and safeguarded by God himself, who is an entity 'in no way whatsoever unjust': θεὸς οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς ἄδικος (176b8–c1). The impression of the relative nature of justice '[a]rises from the narrow perspective that is

9 Ἀλλ› οὔτ› ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν, ὦ Θεόδωρε – ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη – οὔτ› ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἱδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης, *Tht.* 176a5–8 (tr. Levett, with Burnyeat's revision, Burnyeat 1990, 304).

10 Piety is, from this point, left aside. For possible reasons, see Sedley 2004, 82–85.

11 σοφία καὶ ἀρετή, 176c4–5.

12 ἀμαθία καὶ κακία, 176c5.

enforced if one concentrates on issues of justice and injustice within the city – in the law courts, the assembly, the council'.[13]

3.2 The Problem of Evil in the *Theaetetus*

Many modern critics have paid little to no heed to Socrates' thoughts about evil expressed at the beginning of the crucial section of the Digression – 176a–177c. Bostock, Brown, Burnyeat, Chappell, Cornford, Kennedy, Kirk, McDowell, Taylor, and Tschemplik,[14] in their commentaries and notes, either overlook, or only briefly mention *Theaetetus* 176a5–8. Guthrie, however, includes a lengthy excursus to the problem of evil in his discussion of the Digression,[15] although he does not focus his interpretation on the *Theaetetus* passage specifically, but rather follows several threads that may converge into Plato's general theory of evil. Stern is another exception;[16] his views, perhaps more relevant for the present discussion, will be briefly addressed later in this section.

The Ancients, on the other hand, attached great importance to *Theaetetus* 176a5–8, and made it one of the pillars of their own theories of evil and salvation.[17] Plotinus includes quotations from this section in the opening to *Ennead* I.2;[18] he comments on the passage extensively in his treatise on evil, i.e., in *Enn.* I.8.6. He refers to it again in *Enn.* III.2.5 and III.2.15.[19] The two-clause statement from the *Theaetetus* is also one of the most prominent threads knit into the fabric of Proclus' theory of evil. In *De malorum subsistentia* 43.4–5, 44.6–7, 48.6–7, Proclus reminds his readers of Socrates' claim that evil constantly and of necessity prowls the mortal world. Even more significantly, in *De mal.* 54.15–21, he correlates his description of the nature of evil

13 Sedley 2004, 65.

14 See Bostock 1988; Brown 2014; Burnyeat 1990; Chappell 2004; Cornford 1935; Kennedy 1881; Kirk 2015; McDowell 1973; Taylor 1949; Tschemplik 2008.

15 See Guthrie 1978, 92–100.

16 See Stern 2008, 170–176.

17 Which they, of course, considered to be but illuminations of Plato's own doctrine.

18 Ἐπειδὴ <τὰ κακὰ> ἐνταῦθα καὶ <τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης>, βούλεται δὲ ἡ ψυχὴ φυγεῖν τὰ κακά, <φευκτέον ἐντεῦθεν> – 'Since the evils are here and prowl about this place as a matter of necessity, and since the soul desires to escape the evils, it must flee from here' (*Enn.* I.2.1.1–3). Plotinus' argument follows the text of the *Theaetetus*; he identifies the escape form the earthly world with becoming similar to God, and becoming similar to God, with becoming perfectly virtuous.

19 Armstrong 1980, 60, footnote 1 is emphatic about the broader metaphysical significance of the relevant *Theaetetus* bit for Plotinus and describes it as 'the often-repeated quotation from Plato, *Theaetetus* 176A5, one of the cardinal texts of Plotinian Neoplatonism'.

as παρυπόστασις – that is to say, as a by-product of failed attempts to attain the good – with the *Theaetetus* 176a6 description of evil as ὑπεναντίον of τὸ ἀγαθόν, which he understands as neither a contrary *per se* of the Good, nor as a full-scale privation.[20]

Let us now try to discern the philosophy behind the segment on evil in the *Theaetetus*. Thematically, it may be divided in two parts. The first one states that evils cannot be eradicated: ἀλλ' οὔτ' ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν, ὦ Θεόδωρε (176a5), and provides a reason for this: ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη (176a5–6).[21] The second ascribes a particular location to evil, reaffirms its inevitability, and possibly suggest its origin: οὔτ' ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἱδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης (176a6–8).[22] They comprise a single unit, of course, but highlight different aspects of the problem as posited by Plato at that particular stage of his explorations. The following sections concisely examine the topics of the good, its (sub)contrary, and their necessary relation arising from the first part of the *Theaetetus* segment on evil, as well as the notions of mortal nature and necessity mentioned in the second part.

3.2.1 *The Status of τὸ ἀγαθόν at 176a6*

A point of broader metaphysical consequences for Plato's understanding of evil, as hinted in *Theaetetus* 176a5–8, is a particular interpretation of τὸ ἀγαθόν that will be discussed in the present section. The main assumption here is that this noun phrase does not refer to a specific good – like pleasure, convenience, usefulness, or even virtue – but to the Good itself. The following considerations, listed in increasing order of pertinence, are submitted to support this interpretation.

Firstly, it is perhaps worth mentioning that τὸ ἀγαθόν (with a definite article and in the singular) – a standard Platonic locution for the highest reality since the *Republic* – appears only once in the *Theaetetus*, in the very middle of

20 In a word, Proclus holds that evil does not have a proper cause but is produced involuntarily by the multitude of acting souls and bodies. As such it does not have ὑπόστασις of its own, but only παρυπόστασις – some kind of parasitic existence (see *De mal.* 49, 50, 54). He also considers that the *Theaetetus* refers to this mode of (non)being of evil as the opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν, i.e., the ὑπεναντίον. It is interpreted as a dim, intermediate concept comparable to the conflicting opposites in Aristotelian privation, and equally destructive; however, it is not only incomparably lower than the Good, but also derives from it its very power of opposition.

21 'But it is not possible for the evils to be destroyed, Theodorus, for it is necessary that the Good always has an opposite'.

22 'Nor it is possible that they are situated among the gods, but they permeate mortal nature and this place here as a matter of necessity'.

the dialogue. Although it may sound coincidental or over–interpretative, this is strongly reminiscent of the singularity and centrality of the Form of the Good in Plato's philosophy.

In addition, it was already mentioned in the previous section that one of the purposes of the Digression is to draw a contrast between civic or apparent, and true or philosophical virtue. Plato considers that not only the so-called advantages of aristocratic lineage and wealth, but also the admirable qualities like piety and courage, cease to be good when used unwisely. Hence, the central element of philosophical virtue is knowledge;[23] knowledge is primarily of the Forms, all of which owe both their being and capacity to be known to the Good.[24] Virtue, thus, ultimately depends on the Good. Vices, on the other hand, are contraries of virtues, and ought to originate in something opposite to the Good. But an opposite to the good (τὸ ὑπεναντίον) is mentioned at 176a5–6, which allows the interpretation of τὸ ἀγαθόν as the Good, provided τὸ ὑπεναντίον is understood as distinct from, and underlying τα κακά – the evils, including vices. This thesis will be discussed below.

What is more, Plato's Theory of Forms may play a substantial role in the *Theaetetus*, although it is not as fully articulated as it is in the *Republic* or in the *Phaedo*. This vast, unresolved issue cannot be addressed properly here; the following paragraphs will but highlight the textual signals suggesting the presence of Plato's most characteristic doctrine of the Middle period in the Digression.

At least three statements in the Digression use language and images highly evocative of the transcendent Forms. In 174a1, Socrates explains to Theodorus that the philosopher is indifferent to the mundane, and concentrates on 'exploring in every way the total nature of the things that are, each taken as a whole' – πᾶσαν πάντῃ φύσιν ἐρευνωμένη τῶν ὄντων ἑκάστου ὅλου. The key expression here is τὸ ὂν, often used in the Platonic corpus to refer to Being. In 174b, Socrates depicts the philosopher as someone who barely knows whether his neighbour is a man or some other creature, but is highly interested in discovering 'what on earth man is' – τί δέ ποτ' ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, 174b3–4. This is reminiscent of the Platonic method of dialectical ascent, leading from sensible particulars (in this case, the human neighbour) to what-the-thing-in-itself-is (αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν· ἄνθρωπος, ἀγαθόν, κερκίς, ὂνομα, etc.). Finally, 175c contains the

23 Socrates famously believed that all virtue is knowledge (see *Lach.* 199c, and *Prt.* 332a–360d, 361b). Plato never really disassociated himself from his master's stance on the issue. An echo of this understanding in the *Theaetetus* Digression is found in Plato's exhortation to become as similar to God as possible. That aim is achieved by becoming just and pious, *by aid of wisdom*.

24 See *Resp.* 508b–509b, esp. 509b6–10.

statement most suggestive of Plato's theory of Forms. Plato describes the relationship between the philosopher and his fellow men: the philosopher strives to drag them out of their slavish mentality of worldly entanglements, and to engage them instead in the 'examination of justice and injustice themselves, what each of the two in itself is, and how they differ from everything else and from one another'.[25] This is almost clear allusion to the Allegory of the Cave in *Republic* VII,[26] complete with the study of the eternal realities underlying particular entities and phenomena, and the duty incumbent upon the traveler to the Intelligible to share his experience upon his return. Although these passages are suggestive rather than conclusive,[27] the objections proposed by the opponents are even less convincing. In fact, many scholars either embrace the presence of the Forms in the *Theaetetus* in general and in its Digression in particular or are not directly averse to it – evidence that this view is anything but outlandish. Cornford, for instance, identifies the assertion that no account of knowledge that excludes the Forms is plausible as the main conclusion from the discussion led in the dialogue.[28] Guthrie is also convinced of the presence of the theory of the Forms especially in the Digression.[29] Cherniss, Hackforth, Sedley, and Tschemplik belong to the same camp,[30] while Burnyeat and McDowell are less enthusiastic but do not exclude the possibility that the Forms might have been evoked in the Digression.[31] If so, it is unsurprising that Plato should refer to his highest principle in the Digression's most remarkable passage, where Socrates discusses good and evil, God and salvation.

Finally, were not the Good on Plato's mind while writing 176a, it would be difficult to determine his purpose. Was he referring to some particular good, such as pleasure or mundane virtue? That is hardly possible. For one thing,

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25 εἰς σκέψιν αὐτῆς δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἀδικίας, τί τε ἑκάτερον αὐτοῖν καὶ τί τῶν πάντων ἢ ἀλλήλων διαφέρετον, 175c2–3.

26 See, e.g., Cornford 1935, 86; Sedley 2004, 73.

27 As argued by Burnyeat and McDowell; see below.

28 'The *Theaetetus* will formulate and examine the claim of the senses to yield knowledge. The discussion moves in the world of appearance and proves that, if we try to leave out of account the world of true being, we cannot extract knowledge from sensible experience', Cornford 1935, 7.

29 'The attempts to define knowledge in the main part of the dialogue are carried out by every means short of the doctrine of Forms, and end in failure. The digression assures us that the teaching of *Phaedo* and *Republic*, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* has not been abandoned, and that the successful search for the nature of knowledge lies beyond Plato's self-imposed limitations here', Guthrie 1978, 91.

30 See Cherniss 1936; Hackforth 1957; Sedley 2004, 71; and Tschemplik 2008, 143.

31 See Burnyeat 1990, 38–39, and McDowell 1973, 174–177. Bostock 1988, Cooper 1970, and Robinson 1950 do not accept the presence of the Forms in the *Theaetetus*.

were that the case, Plato would have used the plural noun – τἄγαθα, because its supposed counterpart takes the plural as well – τὰ κακά. For another, Plato never considered any instance of well-being as a type of good proper; pleasure has been dismissed as such already in the *Euthydemus* and *Gorgias*. What is more, since the philosopher of the Digression was depicted as someone who soars high with his thoughts, it would be absurd to assume that τὸ ἀγαθόν refers to any of the above. Plato could, then, refer to philosophical virtue, which requires the existence of virtues as absolute values. This fits the tone of the Digression, and offers a connection with the Forms: 'True justice is to be found only after an intellectual ascent to the intelligible world outside the cave. For Plato true justice is a Form'.[32] And if Plato, in this section, is already operating in the transcendent realm, it would be plausible for him to use τὸ ἀγαθόν to refer to the one Form on which all the rest depend. For any Form, including moral Forms such as Justice, etc., is '[i]tself fully understandable only in the light of a yet higher entity, the Form of the Good'.[33] Therefore, it is reasonable to understand τὸ ἀγαθόν in *Theaetetus* 176a6 as a reference to the Good itself.

3.2.2 *The Status of ὑπεναντίον at 176a6*

Line 176a6 contains Plato's significant assertion that it is necessary (εἶναι ἀνάγκη) for the Good always to have some opposite (ὑπεναντίον τι). This is not a simple confirmation that human experience must include both good and bad – both joys and sorrows, both virtues and vices. Such a statement would be overly trivial, and the purport of τὸ ἀγαθόν is deeper. Neither is Plato claiming that wherever there is virtue, there must be vice, since 'there is an escape from the evils in the soul',[34] as is convey by the image of the flight from here to heaven and the endeavour to become as similar to God as possible (*Tht.* 176a8–b2). Plato also explains in the *Timaeus* that death, vice, etc., have no place among the gods,[35] and that even the souls of the mortals may obtain full redemption and re-appropriation of their original state of purity.[36] Therefore, the existence of virtue does not necessitate the presence of its opposite. As such , if τὸ ἀγαθόν is not a particular good, but the principle from which all good originates, its opposite must be a type of principle as well. Plato does not disclose what this principle may be, but the following two hypotheses seem plausible.

32 Sedley 2004, 76.
33 Sedley 2004, 76.
34 See Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.8.5.29–30.
35 See *Tim.* 40a–b, 41a–b.
36 See *Tim.* 42c–d.

a) The opposite (ὑπεναντίον) in question is not identical to the evils (τὰ κακά) from 176a5. The plural form indicates individual evils, and they cannot be the proper opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν. This is so regardless of whether τὸ ἀγαθόν be understood as *some good* or *the Good.* In the first case, the evils cannot play the role of the opposite because they are many, while one single thing can have one opposite only, as already argued in *Protagoras* 322a–333b. In the second, because Plato seems to equate those evils with the contraries of justice, piety and wisdom (*Tht.* 176b1–3), as aptly noted by Plotinus: τὰ κακὰ αὐτῷ ἡ κακία καὶ ὅσα ἐκ κακίας.[37] Since these evils already each have their appropriate opposite, which are the virtues, the opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν must be sought elsewhere.

b) Plato's choice of the term designating the opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν seems deliberate and significant. He does not use the much more common ἐναντίον, but instead combines it with the preposition ὑπό, to get ὑπεναντίον. This compound may denote the subcontrary of the Aristotelian square of opposites, which is certainly not the case here. In the given context, it is likely to refer to a notion of contrariety in which one constituent subsists on a lower level, is somehow subordinate or inferior to its opposite, as suggested by the meaning of ὑπό – 'under', 'beneath'. For instance, while the opposites of warm and cold, or pleasure and pain, share equal ontological status, the same cannot be said of the Good and its undefined opposite. The Good is the source of the eternal realities' being and conceivability, while its opposite, although coeval with the Good (ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἀεὶ εἶναι), must be of a much lesser ontological weight.

3.2.3 *The Status of τὰ κακά and Their Relation to the ὑπεναντίον*

It would be useful now to briefly inspect a few approaches related to the above suggestion that τὰ κακά and τὸ ὑπεναντίον of the *Theaetetus* are not to be identified. In the Levett-Burnyeat translation,[38] τὰ κακά is rendered by 'evil', in the singular, which gives the misleading impression that the evils and the opposite of the Good are identical. Thus also translates Kennedy, but not Cornford, McDowell, Chappell or Sedley, although they do seem to accept the implications of the Levett-Burnyeat rendering. In Chappell's translation, the clause runs as follows: 'But it is not possible for evils to be destroyed, Theodorus. There always has to be something opposite to the good'. Chappell has been singled

37 'For him, the evils are vice and those things that arise from vice', *Enn.* 1.8.6.13. The escape from this world is thus an escape from human wickedness and its consequences.

38 See pp. 89–90 above.

out because of the note that he adds: 'Even Plato nods; this feeble untruism is unworthy of him. It is true that the *concept* of evil must always have content so long as the concept of good has. It does not follow that evil must actually *exist* so long as good does'.[39] An attempt was made earlier to show that Plato could not have thought what Chappell imputes to him, since that would had contradicted some of the emphatic claims he made elsewhere. Plato's intention was not to assert that good and evil are inseparable, but to make a metaphysical claim by stating that the Good as a principle necessarily has an opposite. However, this purport becomes obscured beyond repair when the evils (τὰ κακά) are taken to be the opposite.

Another critic who understands τὰ κακά as identical with τὸ ὑπεναντίον takes Chappell's objection to the extreme and writes:

> [E]vils cannot perish because there must always be something contrary to the good. If this is the case, then the existence of that which is good in itself must be dubious: that which is good is so only in relation to something else, specifically, in relation to evil. Without evil, good does not exist.[40]

That Plato should entertain this view seems implausible, regardless of the interpretation of ὑπεναντίον. Stern understands Plato's opposites as strongly relational terms, which are not only defined as such but cannot exist independently of one another. This understanding may be perhaps accurately applied to Heraclitus' opposites, which are highly interdependent, even incomplete and insignificant without each other:[41] 'Members of pairs of correlatives, such as good and evil, or sickness and health, or justice and injustice, have significance only in relation to their opposites'.[42]

Plato's concept of opposites does not involve such strong relationism, at least when it includes virtues or values. While the virtues' imperfect instantiations on the material plane must have opposites, in their real existence as Forms they are both independent and transcendent, while the instances

39 Chappell 2004, 125.

40 Stern 2008, 171. Benardete mentions the same issue but remains much more tentative. He writes that, by positing the necessary relation between the good and the bad, Plato might imply either that humans cannot receive the good if they do not have the bad as well, or that the bad always comes together with the good attained by the philosopher. In the end, 'It is hard to make out what Socrates means', Benardete 1984, I.132.

41 See DK B58, 60, 61.

42 Greene 1936, 101.

of vice and badness seem to be reducible to various degrees of insufficiency[43] whose cause lies in the prime insufficiency – which we believe to be corporeality, or ἀνάγκη.[44] As a matter of fact, Plato does use the notion of strongly interdependent contraries in his Argument from Opposites in *Phaedo* 70c–72d; however, that argument is concerned with the phenomenon of change, does not include any value-concepts, and does not provide justification for Stern's claim that good cannot exist without evil. Plato never claims that courage cannot exist without cowardice, beauty without ugliness, or life without death. In fact, Stern's objection would offer an effective *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the suggestion that τὰ κακά are the ὑπεναντίον of τὸ ἀγαθόν. Were evils the opposites of the good in the *Theaetetus*, the road for Stern's complaint would be wide open. Yet, it is highly improbable that Plato would commit such grave mistake as to bring in question 'the existence of that which is good' unless it is related to evil. Therefore, the error must belong to the commentators: the opposite of the Good is not the particular types of evil (τὰ κακά); these are but symptoms of the real opposite, the ὑπεναντίον.

3.2.4 *The Status of ἀνάγκη at 176a6 and Its Relation to the ὑπεναντίον*

In the passage referring to evil at 176a5–8, Plato uses the word 'necessity' (ἀνάγκη) twice. In its first appearance, ἀνάγκη adverbially modifies the clause 'the Good always has an opposite' and turns it into a modal proposition, a statement of *de re* modality, asserting that the Good necessarily has the property of having an opposite.[45]

Such a conception may contradict Aristotle's claim that substance cannot have a contrary[46] – granted that the Good is a substance or something above it. *A fortiori,* it appears strange that it must necessarily have an opposite.[47] To these issues only tentative solutions can be submitted here. As regards the first one, we shall build on Plotinus' solution. He starts by amending Aristotle's definition of opposites as 'things set furthest apart from each other, while

43 'Badness in all its varieties may prove to be definable merely in terms of deviation from the relevant good ideal – unlike a symmetrically related pair such as large-small or odd-even, each of which has its own intrinsic nature and is therefore not adequately definable in terms of its opposite's absence', Sedley 2004, 78, footnote 120.

44 See 3.2.6 and 4.3.3 below.

45 The modal operator does not range over the proposition as a whole (the *dictum*), but over its subject matter (the *res*). In other words, the claim is not that the proposition is necessarily true, but that a certain thing necessarily possesses a certain property.

46 See *Cat.* 3b24–27.

47 See Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.8.6.21–23.

belonging to the same genus'.[48] Though acknowledging that the philosopher is right when it comes to most pairs of opposites, Plotinus also considers that opposites *par excellence* (μάλιστα ἂν εἴη ἐναντία) may be defined simply as 'things furthest removed from each other'.[49] Such is the pair formed of the Good and its opposite. The claim that the Good has, and even must have an opposite, may be defended as follows. The existence of the Good is a Platonic axiom, while the presence of individual goods – reason, life, virtues – is an empirical fact. Equally indubitable is the premise that everything good and noble has its origin in, and depends for its subsistence on, the Good. On the other hand, it is obvious that there are bad things in this world as well, such as passions, vices, the body, death. They must originate either from something, or from nothing. But nothing comes from nothing, so they must originate from something. That something cannot be the Good, because it produces only goodness and excellence. Moreover, the source of badness and depravity cannot have anything in common with the Good and must be furthest removed from it. The Good, thus, has an opposite which, in Plotinus' definition, does not belong to its genus and is furthest away from it.

The question why the Good must necessarily have an opposite is even more problematic, since the modal operator seems to restrict its independence and supremacy. However, it need not be the case, as long as the relation is understood as operational across worlds: τὸ ἀγαθόν, which occupies the highest level in the realm of Being, does not have, and does not have to have, an opposite within its own sphere; this opposite is to be found instead in the lowest level of the world of Becoming. Indeed, for the creation to unfold at all, it must be inferior to the uncreated realm; else it would be an exact replica of the world of Being, which is superfluous. Furthermore, for the Becoming to be inferior, it ought to owe its inferiority to something. The identity of this entity is not disclosed, and this issue will be addressed below. At this stage, we suggest that the entity in question is non-different from the ὑπεναντίον of the *Theaetetus*. The ὑπεναντίον is opposed to τὸ ἀγαθόν just as the lowest point of the world of Becoming is opposed to the highest principle of the world of Being.

3.2.5 *Ἡ θνητὴ φύσις and the Evils*

The second clause of the segment on evil, namely: 'Nor is it possible that they [the evils] are situated among the gods, but they prowl about the mortal nature and this place here as a matter of necessity' (176a6–8), is rather

48 *Cat.* 6a17–18. For Plotinus' position on the issue of contrariety, see O'Brien, 2006, 175–178.

49 τὰ πλεῖστον ἀλλήλων ἀφεστηκότα, *Enn.* I.8.6.40–41. For his claim that even ordinary substances could have opposites, see *Enn.* III.8.6.49–55.

straightforward. The claim that the divine remains untouched by evil does not require much analysis: the gods are supereminently good and only able to generate goodness,[50] as well as immune to death and injury.[51] Thus, they live eternally beyond the reach of moral and physical evils.

The phrase 'mortal nature', however, deserves more attention. The Levett-Burnyeat translation again seems to go somewhat off the mark: Plato does not mention 'human life', but the much broader θνητὴν φύσιν. Kennedy, Cornford, and McDowell opt for 'our mortal nature', where the clause again refers to human nature. Chappell, more faithful to the original, suggests 'this mortal nature', although the demonstrative pronoun does not figure in the Greek text. Sedley's plain 'mortal nature' is the most accurate rendition.

Stern conducts an analysis of the translation of θνητὴν φύσιν as 'mortal nature'.[52] He interprets the evils (τὰ κακά) inherent to mortal nature as finitude and deficiency, ultimately exemplified by death. He continues: 'All living things are mortal and thus needy. Yet, in associating the notions of good and evil with this neediness, Socrates and his interlocutors have in mind specifically *human neediness*'.[53] Stern supports this interpretation with two textual references: 176a4, which expresses Theodorus' conviction that if more people were receptive to Socrates' teachings, there would be less evils *among humans*; and 176a8–b2, which states that the advice to become as godlike as possible is applicable to human beings alone. In short, according to Stern's argument, (a) τὰ κακά of 176a5 stand for neediness or insufficiency, their epitome being death; (b) Socrates discusses only human neediness and mortality. Both propositions contain flaws that will now be examined.

Granted, finitude, imperfection, and suffering are not to be excluded from τὰ κακά, but in the Digression Socrates mainly targets another type of badness. He concentrates on virtues and values such as wisdom, justice, and piety, and urges his interlocutors and his audience to cultivate them. Those unwilling to do so will be unable to attain Justice itself (175c2) and become as just as a human being can be (176c2). Instead, they will sink into worthlessness and unmanliness (οὐδενία τε καὶ ἀνανδρία, 176c4), and be overpowered by ignorance and wickedness (ἀμαθία καὶ κακία, 176c5). Such individuals also seize the pattern of deep unhappiness and remain confined to the place infested with evils (176e–177a). It seems that the evils experienced by human beings generally stem from moral imperfection, the root of which is lack of wisdom,

50 See, e.g., *Resp*. 379a–c.

51 See, e.g., *Tim*. 41b–d.

52 'Evils are said to be a necessary aspect of *mortal* nature', Stern 2008, 172.

53 Stern 2008, 172, italics added.

i.e., ignorance. As such, the key precept of the Digression may be that the soul can overcome mortality by perfecting oneself morally through the cultivation of wisdom. Therefore, deficiencies and death, which Stern identifies as τὰ κακά, are in fact the symptoms of a more basic 'force of evil'. In the *Theaetetus* Digression, it corresponds to lack of virtue, and ultimately ignorance. This should suffice as a comment on Stern's first claim.

The aforesaid could be actually used as an argument in favour of his second claim, according to which only human condition is discussed in the segment on evil. Indeed, non-human animals are incapable of moral or intellectual progress or regress. This being so, we still hold that the mortal nature of 176a7 has a broader meaning. After all, θνητὴν φύσιν simply does not mean 'human nature'. Plato's Timaeus identifies three types of mortal beings (θνητὰ γένη, *Tim.* 41b7), namely winged creatures, those who swim in water, and those who dwell on land (*Tim.* 40a1–2) – and human beings are but one species of the third γένος. In light of this, Plato's choice of words in the *Theaetetus*, combined with his adherence to the doctrine of metempsychosis, could reflect his view that the problem of evil pertains to non-human animals too. That is to say, the Platonic cosmos is inhabited by three kinds of living creatures who share the same mortal nature and similar experiences of suffering; all of them were, are, or will be conscious of their condition, according to their previous, present, or future incarnation in a human body. It ensues that a life of philosophy and moral improvement is available not only to those currently embodied as human beings; with the exception of the few altogether unjust and sinful souls eternally imprisoned in Tartarus, everybody will sooner or later receive the chance to perfect their existence.[54]

Stern's analysis of τὰ κακά as deprivation and finitude, and of θνητὴν φύσιν as human mortality, leads him to a questionable conclusion about Plato's understanding of evil and its opposite.

> For humans, evils are not only needs themselves, but our awareness of these needs. Evil is a condition known as such, a condition that therefore might be otherwise. […] In sum, evil is neediness of which we are aware, and good is that which we judge might answer to this condition of neediness. Insofar as evil is the condition to which good is the remedy, what is good is so only in relation to evil. There is not the good in itself.[55]

54 See pp. 135–136 below.
55 Stern 2008, 172–173.

Plato never understood evil as 'neediness of which we are aware', nor did he consider human neediness or even mortality as evils *per se*. Rather, he interpreted these as unfortunate symptoms of the bodily condition and the ignorance associated with it. Indeed, the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and later the *Phaedo* confirm this idea through their portrayal of Socrates serenely facing the greatest danger, untroubled by the prospect of his imminent death. Socrates repeats time and again that we ought not to fear death, but injustice and ignorance. There is no need to cast Plato as an existentialist thinker horrified by human insufficiencies or accepting them with resignation. As for Stern's interpretation of the good, it suffices to say that defining it as in any way relative or related to the bad is utterly non-Platonic.

3.2.6 *Further Reflections on ἀνάγκη*

The second clause of the segment on evil associates τὰ κακά with 'this place here' – as well as with mortal nature – and states that their presence is a matter of necessity (τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης, 176a7–8). The τόπος in question is evidently the earth.[56] It is equally indisputable that by using ἀνάγκη, Plato confirms the platitude that evils cannot be disassociated from the earthly realm; they permeate it inevitably. As long as one inhabits the mortal plane and lives as a mortal, instead of striving to become as similar to God as possible, he or she is bound to experience moral failures and a variety of sufferings. Although these assertions are incontrovertible, it is still legitimate to pose the meta-question about the origin or the necessity of that necessity, and to propose Plato's probable answer to it.

On the preceding pages it was suggested that the *Theaetetus* segment on evil has a deeper purport than usually assumed. It contains Plato's first elucidation of the ontological basis for the existence of τὰ κακά: the necessary (ἀνάγκη) presence of the contrary to τὸ ἀγαθόν, designated as τὸ ὑπεναντίον. Plato there also determines the precise *locus* of evils (which are mainly vices, although pain, decrepitude, etc., are not excluded): their dwelling place is the earthly region, whence they assault mortal creatures. Finally, just as the presence of the opposite of the Good was said to be necessary, so too the opposite's progeny, i.e., the individual evils, are described as infesting the mortal realm and beings by necessity. Thus, necessity appears twice in *Theaetetus* 176a5–8. The first ἀνάγκη is meant to emphasise that the Good must have an opposite, while the overt purpose of the second one is to convey the idea that the

56 Plotinus in *Enn.* 1.8.6–9 explains that both 'the mortal nature and this place' (ἡ θνητὴ φύσις καὶ ὅδε ὁ τόπος, 1.8.6.8–9) refer to the earth, where there is injustice and disorder, as opposed to heaven, which is devoid of evil.

sensible world may never be free from vice and suffering. However, there could be more to it.

The second occurrence of ἀνάγκη, now as a part of the phrase ἐξ ἀνάγκης, may be read as an anticipation of the Timaean cosmology, and as a confirmation of the proposition that the opposite of τὸ ἀγαθόν is something other than particular evils. This time the word is not used attributively, but substantively; governed by the preposition ἐκ, it expresses origin or cause: 'of necessity', 'by necessity', 'due to necessity', 'through necessity'. To reiterate, Plato's apparent intention in employing the second ἀνάγκη is to emphasise the truism that evil may not be removed from the material sphere. The necessity of this fact, however, derives from the necessary existence of the opposite of the Good. In the *Theaetetus*, τὸ ἀγαθόν sits at the top of the ontological ladder; where there is a top, there must be a bottom, and at the bottom rests the subordinate opposite, which must cause effects contrary to those produced by the Good, and thus be responsible for the bad things. In the first clause of the segment on evil the opposite was denoted with ὑπεναντίον τι, while in the second, Plato alludes to it with the term which will acquire great significance in the *Timaeus* – ἀνάγκη. Even in *Theaetetus* 176a8, regardless of how fanciful it may sound, the following is a legitimate interpretation of the ἐξ ἀνάγκης phrase*:* evils are haunting this world *due to Necessity*.

Necessity is the second, subordinate cause of the *Timaeus*, and we submit that it is identical with the ὑπεναντίον of the *Theaetetus* Digression. Much like ἀνάγκη in the *Timaeus*, it is a brute fact that cannot be circumvented. It provides an explanation for Socrates' claim that evil may not be destroyed: 'because some things are lesser than others in comparison with the nature of the Good',[57] and the lesser they are, the lesser is their share in the nature of the Good. Ἀνάγκη, the ὑπεναντίον, lies at the bottom of the ontological ladder, farthest removed from the 'nature of the Good', and represents ultimate depravation. Since it enters the sensible world as the principle of corporeality, the nature of all embodied things partakes from it, and cannot but appropriate its depravity and imperfection; therefore, embodied things are perceived as evil.

This standpoint is not unheard of in the literature. In his notes to *Laws* 896d, where Plato describes the soul as the cause of everything (αἰτία παντῶν), including both good and evil (τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ τῶν κακῶν), England writes: 'Here is introduced the question of the origin of evil'.[58] He dismisses the possibility that (cosmic) evil may be caused by the soul, and notes that *Timaeus* 48a identifies πλανωμένη αἰτία, i.e., ἀνάγκη, as the entity producing evil in the world

57 Plotinus, *Enn*. III.2.5.30.
58 England 1921, 474.

of corporeality. He highlights the similar use of ἀνάγκη in the *Theaetetus* segment on evil: 'Here, as in the *Timaeus* passage, ἀνάγκη is named as the source of evil. This idea, that evil is confined to bodily existence, and our earth, is in full agreement with all that is said about evil in the *Laws*'.[59] Thus, it appears that the identification of an 'esoteric twist' in the *Theaetetus* Digression is not unfounded, and that it may be linked to the complex cosmological theory of the *Timaeus*.

3.3 Theodicy in the *Theaetetus*

It is plausible to deduce from the above analysis of *Theaetetus* 176a5–8 that, for Plato, this world is a place of evil, in contrast to the abode of the gods. However, with Plato, nothing is unequivocal: this statement may be considered simultaneously false and true in idiosyncratic senses, both charged with potential theodicean implications.

The first alternative – that Plato did not perceive the sensible world as overwhelmed by evil – is not immediately related to the *Theaetetus* Digression, and will therefore not be examined in detail here. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that the creation story of the *Timaeus* strongly vouches for this view: the cosmos is 'the most beautiful of things born',[60] 'a visible god and image of the Intelligible, the greatest, the most excellent, most beautiful, and perfect'.[61] But how do vice, disasters, murders fit into these descriptions? Plato seems to believe in a world in which, whatever is, is exactly as it should be. Even badness, of necessity present there, must somehow contribute to the overall excellence of the whole. Mortality, the prime evil for most of us, also receives a place in the grand picture, and is not to be considered incompatible with the creation's goodness and beauty.[62] Given that the cosmos resembles the most perfect model (*Tim.* 30c–d), it must contain all the orders of entities present in the Paradigm (*Tim.* 41b–c) in order to be complete. The entities present in the cosmos are reflections of the eternal beings present in the Paradigm, and as such must be inferior to these; hence their ephemeral nature.[63] Archer-Hind writes: 'The scheme of existence involves a material counterpart of the ideal

59 England 1921, 475.
60 κάλλιστος τῶν γεγονότων, 29a5.
61 εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεὸς αἰσθητός, μέγιστος καὶ ἄριστος κάλλιστός τε καὶ τελεώτατος, 92c8.
62 For a development of this response to the problem of evil, known as the Aesthetic Solution, see 5.2 below.
63 This line of thought is pursued in more detail in 4.3.1 below.

world. To materiality belong becoming and perishing: accordingly, αἰσθητὰ ζῷα, the copies of νοητὰ ζῷα, must, so far as material, be mortal'.[64]

And yet Plato is not one to turn a blind eye to the facticity of both moral and natural evil.[65] After all, he wrote in the *Theaetetus* Digression that insuperable evils abide in this world by necessity, and in *Republic* 379c4–5 that 'much fewer are the goods in our lives than the evils'. Therefore, it is also true that, for Plato, the mortal plane is the abode of badness – his mild, healthy pessimism originates from this admission. In more banal terms, Plato saw the existence of evil as an opportunity, not an obstacle, and therein lies the seed of the theodicy of the *Theaetetus*. Although largely implicit in the text, an inquiring mind can easily perceive it as a natural consequence of the *Theaetetus* segment of evil discussed in the previous section. Howbeit, let us start from the beginning.

3.3.1 *Socrates and His God*

Plato's Socrates in *Theaetetus* 148e–151d demonstrates once again his acumen and wit by engaging the eponymous character in a discussion on the craft of midwifery. Although the importance of this section of the dialogue cannot be underestimated,[66] it is not directly relevant to our purpose and will not receive much attention here.[67] Instead, we shall focus on Socrates' final warning and plea at 151c2–151d3, which contains an implicit, but potentially significant, theodicean statement.

After explaining the maieutic method to Theaetetus, Socrates lets his young interlocutor know that people are often annoyed or even angered when he delivers a stillborn from them, i.e., when he demonstrates that their opinions were inaccurate. Theaetetus should not follow their example, since Socrates, being a servant of God,[68] act as he does not out of malevolence (δυσνοίᾳ, 151d1), but because he is obligated to promote and cultivate the truth. That he, a humble follower, should be devoid of bad intentions in the performance of his duty, reveals how much more so should his master – the God – be. Indeed, 'no god is malevolent to men',[69] no god can wish or do evil to human beings.

64 Archer-Hind 1888, 140.

65 See pp. 140–141 below.

66 'The passage (148e–151d) in which Socrates compares himself to a midwife is deservedly one of the most famous Plato ever wrote; it should be read with feeling as well as with thought', Burnyeat 1990, 6.

67 For thoughts and analyses on the philosophical significance of Plato comparing Socrates' work with a midwife's, see Burnyeat 1990, 6–7; Cornford 1935, 27–28; Kirk 2015, 75–80; and Sedley 2004, 8–12, 28–37.

68 See *Ap.* 22a4, 23b3–7.

69 οὐδεὶς θεὸς δύσνους ἀνθρώποις, 151d1.

This is a brief but relevant and important statement. In *Theaetetus* 151c2–151d3, Socrates may appear as a man who seemingly hurts those he is actually trying to help and elevate; alternatively, they may really suffer harm, albeit not through Socrates' actions, but because of their own ignorance and failure to recognise his benevolent purpose. So has God often been accused of causing or tolerating the evils done and suffered on earth. However, as one can learn from Plato's teachings discussed in the previous chapters, the deity is incapable of evil and guiltless of its occurrence. In *Theaetetus* 151d1, Plato reaffirms the theodicies of *Republic* II and of the Myth of Er, by excluding the possibility that God could or would act malevolently towards anybody. Socrates himself claims, in the same passage, that even he, an ordinary pious man, is devoid of hatred and ill-will in the pursuance of his duty, despite some people's perception of him. God is not only the shelter of all pious persons, but also inherently unable to produce any kind of badness, while only a malevolent entity can perform, or cause others to perform, deeds of malice and evil – as per Plato's theory of causation. God is, therefore, not the cause of evil.

The *Theaetetus* passage under consideration allows for a further, very significant analogy. Just as Socrates truly wishes his bewildered and startled compatriots well, as he attempts to enlighten and 'pull them upwards',[70] so too God has a higher purpose as he tolerates the evils that permeate our world. This analogy unlocks the theodicy of the *Theaetetus* Digression. Its first postulate is the inescapable nature of evil in the mortal plane;[71] its main pillar is the exhortation to take flight from this realm of evil. Through this seemingly simple advice, Socrates reveals the educational or redemptive nature of the creation, and the benevolent purpose of its creator.

3.3.2 *Plato and the Soul-Making Theodicy*

Socrates' brief comments on evil in *Theaetetus* 176a5–8 are immediately followed by the outline of a possible solution to the problem. As already mentioned, Socrates' response to Theodorus' innocent remark that there would be less evil in the world if more people were philosophically minded[72] is so disproportionate as to require additional attention. Theodorus is simply intrigued by the comparison between the philosophical and the political life, and

70 See *Tht.* 175b9.

71 This idea evolves into a theodicean strategy in the *Timaeus*: evil is a matter of a necessity that not even God has the power to alter.

72 'If you, Socrates, could persuade everyone of the things that you are saying as you did me, there would be more peace and less evil among men' – εἰ πάντας, ὦ Σώκρατες, πείθοις ἃ λέγεις ὥσπερ ἐμέ, πλείων ἂν εἰρήνη καὶ κακὰ ἐλάττω κατ' ἀνθρώπους εἴη, 176a3–4.

realises that higher intellectual and ethical standards would promote a more harmonious society. In response, Plato's Socrates declares that evil is indestructible, and that it inevitably haunts the world of men. This striking claim – not strictly relevant to Theodorus' hypothetical expectation of *less* evils among humans – is perhaps introduced by Plato on purpose, in order to arouse his audience's interest in finding a solution to this bleak situation.

The answer offered by Plato – still unrelated to Theodorus' original statement – is that one should strive to escape the mortal world by becoming as godlike as possible. Our proposal is that this suggestion and its corollaries have theodicean implications, and it could be defended along the following lines.

The absolution of God from responsibility for badness at 151d1 and the gloomy outlook on evil at 176a5–8 practically necessitate a theodicean explanation. This is so because when combined they give rise to the question – if we may paraphrase a notorious formula – 'if God is good, and evil necessary, how may he accommodate it in the world without renouncing his benevolence?' The implicit theodicy provided as a solution to this dilemma in the *Theaetetus* Digression is, to put it anachronistically, Irenaean in spirit.[73] An Irenaean theodicy rests on three basic tenets: (a) humans are created imperfect, immature creatures who need to undergo moral and spiritual growth, a 'soul-making'[74] process; (b) hence, the original fall is not an act of sin against God, but an infantile mistake caused by ignorance; (c) the purpose of the world is to assist humanity in developing perfect moral character, while the inclusion of evil and suffering is meant to draw men closer to God.[75] That is to say that the creation is for the sake of salvation,[76] while the presence of evil serves as a further impetus to purify oneself and leave the mortal region once and for all.

Let us now see how these ideas may be transposed to the relevant *Theaetetus* passages. First, Plato clearly does not share the Augustinian vision of perfect paradise-dwellers developing wicked tendencies for unknown reasons,[77] nor

73 After the Church Father Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.202). The Irenaean approach to theodicy mainly differs from the Augustinian approach in that the former does not consider the 'original fall' as an act of sin and disobedience; therefore, the present state of humanity is not a punishment for Adam's abuse of free will, but a platform for moral development and redemption.

74 The phrase is John Hick's. For a thorough explanation of the notion, see Hick 2017.

75 For a succinct exposition of St. Irenaeus', and associated approaches, to the problem of evil, see Hick 2010, 210–218.

76 According to Irenaeus, 'It is creation that allows the transcendent God to be known, even to those who do not know Christ, like the pagan philosophers', Burns 2020, 158. See also Karamanolis 2021, 59 and 69.

77 See Hick 2010, 64–66.

is he burdened by the Christian concept of sin. On the other hand, he does seem to include in his reflection a concept resembling that of the infamous fall,[78] and certainly holds that humanity has been in the past, and still is, the victim of ignorance. Thus, Plato's ἄνθρωπος is highly deficient in wisdom and virtue, and requires purification and moral growth. Now enter the evils of *Theaetetus* 176a5–8. The putative ontology of the segment was discussed extensively in the last section, but that account's veracity or falsity notwithstanding, its immediate context reveals the presumed higher purpose that evils could serve. The pessimistic picture painted in 176a5–8 casts the shadow of futility over human efforts in this world: it is beyond fixing, and attempts to do so are in vain,[79] while the ubiquity of badness is a sign for discerning men that they ought to abandon the world as soon as possible. Evil cannot be eliminated from the physical realm, 'therefore, one ought to try to flee to that other place as quickly as one can'.[80] Escape from the mortal region to the abode of the gods, is, of course, not to be accomplished by spatial dislocation, but by developing a likeness to God, as far as that is possible (φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, 176b1–2). As discussed in 3.1 above, there is only one way to secure such likeness (ὁμοίωσις): becoming righteous and just towards humanity, as well as devout and pious towards the divine, through real understanding, or wisdom, of what man is, and of what God is.[81] In a word, a godlike person for Plato is one who has fully developed philosophical virtues, which are never distinct from true knowledge.

It is now possible to address the issue of the purpose of the creation, as perhaps envisioned by Plato in the relevant *Theaetetus* passages. Given that the world as we know it is permeated by innumerable evils, and because, according to Plato, it was created by an omnibenevolent deity, investigating its purpose also requires to examine how God could make the pervasive evil serve his good intentions. In reply to this inquiry, the following implicit solution to the problem of evil may be deduced from the *Theaetetus* Digression. Yes, the world is bad, the world is awful; people will hurt you, nature will hurt you, and you will hurt them in return. God, on the other hand, is good. The evils of the

78 This can be deduced from *Timaeus* 41e–42e. See p. 78 above.

79 The philosopher of the Digression is not making any such attempts: he is disassociated from society, immersed in lofty thoughts and sublime aspirations. Scholars have noted that Socrates – both Plato's, and the historical Socrates – has a rather different approach to the city. For the reason behind this discrepancy, see Sedley 2004, 66–68. For a contradicting view and further references, see Stern 2008, 163, footnote 2.

80 διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα, 176a8–b1.

81 'Likeness [to God] means becoming just and pious through wisdom' – ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι, 176b2–3.

mortal realm are there of necessity, and even the omnibenevolent God cannot change that. What he can do is to dovetail them with the higher purpose of the creation, a purpose which is, in Timaeus' words, to travel back to our dwelling on our kindred star.[82] In other words, God, who is all-good, utilises the necessary, unescapable evils as an impetus for humanity to rise above its earthly condition and join the chorus of the gods:[83] the valley of tears is the path to salvation. Through God's benevolent steering, the world's inherent harshness, and even the injustice inflicted and endured by human beings, acquire soul-making properties. As humanity receives the opportunity to make the best out of a bad bargain, God is exculpated, and the role of evil is elucidated.

The burden of unearthing these truths and declaring them to humanity is taken up by Plato, who is, just like Socrates, a true aide of God. As if to dissipate any doubts as to the theodicean import of the Digression's concluding passage, he states: 'God is in no way and in no wise unjust, but most righteous to the utmost' (θεὸς οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς ἄδικος, ἀλλ' ὡς οἷόν τε δικαιότατος, 176b8–c1).[84] He is, therefore, incapable of acts of unrighteousness. Mankind is invited to imitate God in this respect and strive for virtue, since that is the only way to escape evil. Otherwise, a person may fall into the trap of unphilosophic life and imitate the unjust practices of the mundane, which perhaps yield transient pleasures and reputation in this world, but ultimately lead to deepest sorrow. For there are two patterns established in reality,[85] one of divine happiness, the other of ungodly wretchedness. The first one is God,[86] the second the worldly men's aspirations, which are inevitably unrighteous.[87]

82 πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ συννόμου πορευθεὶς οἴκησιν ἄστρου, *Tim.* 42b3–4.

83 See *Phdr.* 247a–c.

84 The peculiar construction ὡς οἷόν τε δικαιότατος, most righteous (δικαιότατος) so far as possible, *could* be meant to indicate that God is righteous as far as the inherent badness of corporeality and the independent actions of the moral agents allow him; that is to say, all appearances of unrighteousness are not due to him, but to the latter two factors.

85 See 176e3: Παραδειγμάτων, ὦ φίλε, ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἑστώτων.

86 '[T]o model oneself on the pattern of God's blessed perfection and thereby to take flight from the evils of this world (176b)', Burnyeat 1990, 34. And more explicitly: '[t]he good paradigm which we are urged to imitate is, once again, god', Sedley 2004, 79.

87 The identity of the second pattern is uncertain. It could be a Form, as the language of the sentence suggests. However, that is highly contestable, both with respects to its attributes (most wretched and godless), and to the very question whether Plato allowed for Forms of bad things. As for the latter issue, Cherniss 1954, 27 is adamant that he did, Guthrie 1978, 97–100 is rather negatively inclined towards that idea, and so is Sedley 2004, 78–79. I believe that τὸ ὂν of 176e3 can be taken in a loose sense as referring both to Being and Becoming, since Becoming is not utterly bereft of reality (see, e.g., *Phd.* 79a; *Tht.* 182c–183c; *Phlb.* 23c–27c; *Tim.* 35a, 37a–b, 52a–d). The second pattern would then be the godless society driven by ignorance. For a similar interpretation, see McDowell 1973, 176–177.

The philosopher warns that those who make worldly aspirations the object of their μίμησις will be punished, and the blame shall be upon themselves. Driven by ignorance, they indulge in injustice, the penalty for which is worse than death.[88] Such individuals are bound to develop an increasing likeness to the pattern of unhappiness, and to live lives of badness on this Earth, without ever ascending to the place pure of evils (ὁ τῶν κακῶν καθαρὸς τόπος, 177a5).[89] Through his account of the two paradigms and the mention of the penalty reaped in this life and in the next (176d–177a), Plato urges his readers not to comply in moral weakness; it will transform them from 'men into wolves' (*Resp.* 566a4). Such people may prosper in this life but will lead innumerable future lives as 'evil men associated with evils' (κακοὶ κακοῖς συνόντες, *Tht.* 177a7). A civilised human being should be able to choose correctly between good and bad, and the philosopher's role is to help him. The ubiquity of badness, which we all bitterly lament, provides the impetus to strive for its opposite, by heeding the philosopher's advice and working one's way up to the divine realm. Hence the usefulness and the soul-making value of both moral and physical evil.

3.4 Closing Remarks

This chapter's subject of scrutiny has been the *Theaetetus* Digression, especially its closing passages. The title of the chapter is in interrogatory mode, for a reason that is perhaps obvious: in the Digression there is no explicit appeal to God's blamelessness for evil, even though his goodness is highlighted twice, at 151d1 and 176b8–c1. And yet our hope is that a meaningful theodicy has been extracted from the Digression's relevant statements. While section 1 of the chapter briefly introduced the context of the discussion, i.e., the *Theaetetus* Digression and the debate between Socrates and Theaetetus that had led to it, section 2 grappled with *Theaetetus* 176a5–8, with the two clauses on evil so highly regarded by some later Platonists. It aimed to establish the following major points. First, that 'the good' of 176a6 refers to Plato's highest metaphysical entity, αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθόν. Second, that the ὑπεναντίον of the same line is another metaphysical entity, the contrary of the Good. As the Good generates all things good and beneficial, its contrary is guilty of their opposites. This, if true, supports a further argument in favour of the aforementioned

88 See 176d8–10.

89 See 177a.

dualism thesis.[90] The notions of metaphysical and cosmic dualism have wide theodicean repercussions, because they may indicate that the force of good is not absolutely self-reliant when it comes to cosmological issues. However, by opting for the unusual term ὑπεναντίον, instead of the expected ἐναντίον, Plato avoids the risk of introducing two interdependent causes of equal ontological standing:[91] τὸ ἀγαθόν does have an opposite which is responsible for all badness, but it is inferior and subordinated to it. Third, that τὰ κακά of 176a5 are not to be identified with the ὑπεναντίον. Τὰ κακά are instances of badness – be they moral deficiencies (particularly emphasised in the Digression), or physical sufferings – and thus may only be the opposites of the particular cases of virtue and goodness. The ὑπεναντίον is the principle of all evils and the true contrary of τὸ ἀγαθόν. Four, that the ὑπεναντίον of 176a6 and the second ἀνάγκη in the passage (176a8) may denote the same entity. This interpretation implies that *Theaetetus* 176a5–8 anticipates Plato's later thoughts on evil by evoking the Timaean ἀνάγκη, which is understood throughout this study as the cosmic principle of imperfection in Plato. Hence, the *Theaetetus* segment on evil would also anticipate the Recalcitrant Entity Solution to the problem of evil – a theodicean strategy developed in 4.3.3 below.

Following this exploration of the origin and unavoidable nature of evil, section 3 turned to the implicit theodicy of the Digression. Although not unequivocally articulated, it results almost naturally from the conjunction of the propositions regarding God's benevolence on the one hand, and the discussion of evil on the other. The theodicy of the *Theaetetus* differs from most theodicean strategies presented in this study insofar as it does not exculpate God by identifying distinct causes or reasons for evil,[92] but instead focuses on the individual 'sufferers' and the latent benefits they could reap from living in a world where badness is inevitable. This approach has become known as the Irenaean type of theodicy. It rests on the conviction that evil and suffering

90 See pp. 38–39 above.

91 For this objection, although in the Christian context of the God/uncreated matter debate, see Karamanolis 2021, 61.

92 Including the *sub specie boni* approaches – if we may call them so – according to which everything that God does is for some good, and so evil also has its proper place and purpose in the broad picture of the universe. The theodicy of the *Theaetetus* bears some affinity with the explanation of evil offered during the discussion of the Aesthetic Theme (see 5.2 below), but also presents differences. The main one is that 'evil' in the Aesthetic Theme is primarily understood as suffering administered by the laws of nature as a form of purificatory punishment, while 'evil' in *the Theaetetus* is taken in a broader sense and as a brute fact supervenient on the make-up of the physical world.

have soul-making potential: such experiences could allow those exposed to them to develop moral strength, and the desire to transcend this mortal realm. That is exactly what Plato's Socrates advises to Theodorus: to become virtuous through wisdom, and flee from here to the divine abode that is free of evil. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the description of the two patterns and of the penalty that awaits the wrongdoer anticipates the theodicean strategy known as the Justice in the Afterlife Solution, explored in section 5.3 below.

CHAPTER 4

Theodicy in the *Timaeus*

Plato's *Timaeus* does not require much introduction; it has been, and probably will remain, the most commented upon and analysed of all of his dialogues. Its various aspects – cosmogonic, psychogonic, cosmological, ethical, mathematical, etc. – have been well documented and thoroughly investigated, to the exception of its contribution to theodicy, which has so far been insufficiently acknowledged.[1] Hence, this chapter highlights several theodicean strategies, implicitly or explicitly developed in the *Timaeus*. Some of them became fundamental for the theodicies of coryphaei such as Plotinus and St. Augustine, and later gained great renown through the works of these and other authors.

Before engaging with the properly theodicean passages of the *Timaeus*, two preliminary points will be brought to the readers' attention. In this regard, section 1 presents the second of the two motives that may have prompted Plato to defend God's righteousness, introduced at the beginning of chapter 1 above: the incongruous notion of divine envy, or φθόνος. Section 2 concentrates on Plato's rebuttal of this practically atheistic idea, considers the conceptual meaning of φθόνος in order to clarify the target of Plato's objection, and offers a general Platonic answer to the question 'why the world at all?'. This last issue is of particular importance for any theodicy, since it is closely related to the divine property of omnibenevolence, as well as to the Principle of Plenitude thesis. Section 3 represents the core of the investigations into the theodicy of the *Timaeus*, and discusses the three key strategies discernible in the dialogue: the Principle of Plenitude, the Solution from Personal Responsibility, and the Recalcitrant Entity Solution – in order of textual appearance. The Principle of Plenitude purports to explain the abundance of life forms in the universe as something good, even though some of them appear to be superfluous or unwanted. The Solution from Personal Responsibility, already encountered, addresses the moral aspect of the problem of evil, while the Recalcitrant Entity Solution seeks to establish the Timaean Necessity as the principal cause of natural evils, and thus to exculpate God. Necessity, the primordial material contained in the cosmic Receptacle and used for the construction of the physical world, also represents the origin of metaphysical evil. Finally, section 4 will

1 '[Plato's] theodicy, if it is to be found anywhere, is surely in the *Timaeus*', Broadie 2001, 1. The conditional tone of this statement reflects the widespread denial of Plato's involvement with theodicy.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004679306_006

offer a few thoughts on the seeming abandonment of the notion of personal moral responsibility in *Timaeus* 86d–e.

4.1 Traditional Religion's Second Profanation: Divine Envy

It was proposed at the beginning of this work that Plato, to provide firm foundations for his theology and theodicy, first had to suppress and refute two popular misconceptions installed by traditional religion in the minds of its adherents. The first one was the idea that the gods are dispensers of both good and evil, while the second was the concept of divine envy or grudge. In this chapter, the latter will be taken as the starting point of the discussion of Plato's theodicy in the *Timaeus*.

Although already present in the works of several earlier (and contemporary) poets and dramatists, the classical expression of the motif of φθόνος θεῶν is found in Herodotus' *Histories*, where it occurs at least five times.[2] The best known of these occurrences belongs to the conversation between Croesus, king of Lydia, and celebrated Athenian legislator and poet Solon.[3] The gist of the story of their encounter and discussion goes as follows: urged by his Lydian host, Solon takes a tour of the latter's magnificent treasure storeroom. He is then asked to name the happiest (ὀλβιώτατος) man he has ever seen. Much to Croesus' surprise, Solon selects Tellus the Athenian: he was moderately wealthy, lived a full life span, had offspring who survived him, and died a noble and heroic death.[4] Croesus does not even qualify for second place: Solon awards it to Cleobis and Biton, young men who performed a remarkable deed at a festival in honour of Hera. When their mother begged the goddess to grant them the highest blessing a mortal can attain, Hera made them fall asleep in the temple, and die in their sleep.[5] According to Solon, the goddess used the example of these brothers to teach the entire world that, for a human being, it is better to die than to live (διέδεξέ τε ἐν τούτοισι ὁ θεὸς ὡς ἄμεινον εἴη ἀνθρώπῳ

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2 See *Hdt.* I.32.5–6 – in Solon's answer to Croesus' inquiry; III.40.6–7 – in Amasis' recommendation to his ally Polycrates; VII.10.53–54 and VII.46.18–19 – in Artabanus' counsel to his cousin Xerxes; VIII.109.13–14 – in Themistocles' address to the Athenians.

3 This is almost certainly a fictional narrative, in which Herodotus develops his own pessimistic outlook on the instability and transitory nature of human happiness. See Greene 1948, 84, and Shapiro 1996, 348. For the view that Herodotus does not himself support, but simply reports this view – especially the reliance on divine grudge as a force behind historical events – see Lang 1984, 61.

4 *Hdt.* I.30.

5 *Hdt.* I.31.

τεθνάναι μᾶλλον ἢ ζώειν).[6] Croesus is humiliated; despite his immense wealth and power, he can at best be called lucky (εὐτυχής) – but not happy (ὄλβιος) – because he lacks Solon's wisdom and is ignorant of the facts that: (a) the deity is always wholly envious[7] and troublesome regarding human matters (τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν τε καὶ ταραχῶδες ἐπειρωτᾷς ἀνθρωπηίων πρηγμάτων πέρι, 1.32.5–7); (b) consequently, man is entirely a plaything of fortune (πᾶν ἐστι ἄνθρωπος συμφορή, 1.32.20–21), and his so-called happiness could be overturned at any moment;[8] (c) in the light of (a) and (b), nobody should be pronounced happy, until they have ended their life well, for every matter should be examined in the light of its termination (σκοπέειν δὲ χρὴ παντὸς χρήματος τὴν τελευτὴν).[9]

In an attempt to explain the phenomenon of divine grudgingness or envy, Lanzillotta[10] enumerates four main interpretations suggested by different groups of scholars. These are (i) the anthropomorphic: since the Greeks

6 *Hdt.* 1.31.15–16. The story of Cleobis and Biton brings forward an idea which is virtually non-existent in Solon's preserved fragments. This exceedingly pessimistic view may originate from Herodotus' own philosophy (cf. Rémillard 2009/2010, 16), inspired by earlier writers: the same idea, in its stern, candid form, was vividly expressed by Theognis, lines 425–428 (in Gerber 1999), and repeated by Herodotus' early contemporary Sophocles, *OC* 1225–1229. On the contrary, Harrison 2000, 36–40 considers that Solon's speech in Herodotus' tale is quite consistent with the views of historical Solon.

7 'Jealous', 'grudging', 'ill-willed', are also commonly used to translate the Greek φθονερός. Taylor 1928, 78 refers to this idea as 'the *common Greek view* that τὸ θεῖον is φθονερόν, 'grudging', in its bestowal of good things' (emphasis added). Herodotus' originality lies in the unambiguous formulation, and in his insistence on the phenomenon of divine envy or grudge as instigator of historic events.

8 The fickle nature of fortune – a commonplace among many Greek authors of various periods – is highlighted by Herodotus as the programmatic opening to his *Histories*: 'Knowing that no human prosperity ever remains in the same place, I shall commemorate both [small and great cities of men]' (*Hdt.* 1.5.16–18). See Harrison 2000, 28–29 and 62: 'The *Histories*, it seems, are founded on the principle of the instability of human fortune'. The story of Solon's encounter with Croesus shows that this instability is, at least in the case of humans who outshine the mediocre majority, owing to divine intervention.

9 1.32.46–47. For the entire discourse, see *Hdt.* 1.32–34. For arguments supporting the idea that Herodotus embraces as his own each of Solon's three points, see Shapiro 1996, 352–355. About the first point, crucial for our purpose, Harrison 2000, 32–33 states: 'the conclusion that a god is angry or that he is jealous constitutes for Herodotus a deduction from the course of events'.

10 Lanzillotta 2010, 78–80. His purpose is to overturn the very idea that a concept such as the envy of gods existed among the Greeks: 'It is my contention that in Greek religion there is no such a thing as the 'envy of the gods' and that when the Greeks use the term φθόνος they in fact simply refer to the divine right to veto human happiness […] they never resorted to envy as the background explanation for divine driving force' (2010, 76). Although he adequately challenges this almost universally accepted concept, his effort is ultimately inconclusive, for the following reasons.

attribute a variety of human passions to the gods, it is unsurprising to find envy among them; (ii) the ethico-religious, according to which the φθόνος θεῶν is a reaction to human ὕβρις, and is therefore more νέμεσις than φθόνος; (iii) the egalitarian, which views the phenomenon against the background of social and political tendencies of fifth-century Athens, and explains φθόνος θεῶν as a divine intervention ensuring the preservation of the appropriate distribution of fortune and adversity; (iv) the anthropological: the φθόνος θεῶν is a mythical expression of the old (and persistent) evil-eye superstition.[11]

These interpretations emerge from the careful study of the relevant occurrences of the verb φθονεῖν[12] and its cognates (as well as associated words, like ἄγασθαι[13] and μεγαίρειν[14]) in a wide body of literature, including Homer, Pindar,

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First, although he – rightly – presupposes 'the divine right to veto human happiness', he does not provide a justification for the reasons that prompt the gods to exercise this right. They are sometimes prompted by rightful νέμεσις, indignation at undeserved good fortune, but at other times the exercise of this right seems to be motivated by sheer whim – 'for to many has god given a glimpse of happiness, just to later ruin them utterly', *Hdt.* 1.32.47–33.1. It is a short road from whim to spite: Croesus, for example, was in fact a pious (see *Hdt.* 1.86) and forgiving man (see *Hdt.* 1.44–45). Herodotus offers the following reason for his downfall: after Solon departed, the indignant god overturned Croesus' fortune, *because he considered himself the happiest of all men* (see *Hdt.* 1.33).

Secondly, even though Lanzillotta convincingly argues against the presence of divine envy in other authors under scrutiny (2010, 86–90), his demonstration is less compelling in the case of Herodotus. What is more, he chooses to translate the divine φθονερία as 'avarice', instead of 'envy' (2010, 91) in the passages that stand in contradiction to his thesis. Besides the fact that this choice challenges the lexical definition of the word, it also does little service to Lanzillotta's cause, since it reduces 'the divine right to veto human happiness' to ordinary avarice. If the Greeks had no qualms about accepting divine avarice, why would they not accept also the envy of the gods, when referring to φθόνος θεῶν?

Lastly, it is highly improbable that Plato and Aristotle, who were conversant with the language and the tradition, would so grossly misinterpret the word φθονεῖν in its relevant usages. Plato, in *Timaeus* 29e, clearly rejects the notion of God's envy, or jealousy, or grudge, but not God's right to veto anything. The same applies to Aristotle; significantly, he ascribes the mistaken attribution of envy to the gods to poets, who are not truthful: 'if the poets make sense and the deity is by nature envious […] however it is not possible for the deity to be envious, but, as the saying goes 'many a lie tell the bards'' – εἰ δὴ λέγουσί τι οἱ ποιηταὶ καὶ πέφυκε φθονεῖν τὸ θεῖον […] ἀλλ› οὔτε τὸ θεῖον φθονερὸν ἐνδέχεται εἶναι, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν πολλὰ ψεύδονται ἀοιδοί, *Metaph.* 982b32–983a4.

11 Mikalson's interpretation could be added to this list. He considers the concept of φθόνος as 'one of many explanations of the evils that beset men and countries', attributable not to the individual gods of the cults (like Apollo and Demeter), but to an abstract, generalised divinity (Mikalson 2003, 151).

12 To envy, refuse, prohibit, bear ill-will.

13 To feel envy, bear a grudge against a person.

14 To grudge, hold something to be too great, not to allow something.

Bacchylides, Herodotus, Aeschylus, and Euripides. Herodotus'[15] application of the concept of divine φθόνος in the *Histories* belongs to the ethico-religious approach: the gods do not allow humans to gain excessive power and exceed their allotted measure, which is set very low.[16] According to Lloyd-Jones, Herodotus held 'a conviction of the all-powerfulness of the gods and insignificance of men, and a belief that the gods maintain the universal order of justice by chastising not only mortals who offend against each other, but also mortals who infringe by word or action their own peculiar prerogatives'.[17] He also believes that in authors like Herodotus, the demonstration of divine φθόνος is never malicious, but always just.[18] Shapiro[19] accepts the opinion that divine envy is directed towards those who transgress the boundaries between human and divine sphere. Rémillard proposes an explanation of how this may occur: 'Indeed, extraordinary wealth – or, in fact, any excess – sets itself as a challenge to the gods: the very rich man is responsible for a sort of *hubris*, insofar as he has thought himself superior to a man and similar to a god, and in so doing has blurred the boundaries between heaven and earth'.[20]

The situation may be more complex. Although divine φθόνος in the *Histories* does indeed manifest itself when human prosperity exceeds the allotted measure and generates some type of ὕβρις, careful analysis shows that there is more to the phenomenon than meets the eye. Herodotus provides three examples of characters who aroused divine φθόνος: Croesus (I.32–34), Polycrates (III.40), and Xerxes (VIII.109). All of them are mighty and powerful, but also guilty of

15 The only author whose interpretation will be considered in this study, both because of his emblematic status regarding this issue, and for the sake of brevity.

16 Lanzillotta 2010, 81 rejects this interpretation: 'Resorting to envy as an explanation for divine opposition to human plans, therefore, might have been nonsensical. Not only because gods and humans are then placed on the same existential level, but also, and especially, because it seems to imply that gods desired and were attracted to the nothingness of human happiness'. In his claim, however, he seems to disregard the underdeveloped stage of the religious tradition which was prevalent prior to, and during Herodotus' time, still characterised by anthropomorphised but not sufficiently theologised gods. He also unjustifiably disregards stories such as Zeus' punishment of Prometheus and the human race – quite likely motivated by grudge. This grudge, however, may not have arisen from an attraction to the 'nothingness of human happiness', but might have occurred because the boundaries had been transgressed, and the cosmic order, established and jealously supervised by the gods, had been disturbed. The very same emotion is often identified in Indra, the Indian counterpart of Zeus. See, e.g., the story of Indra and Pṛthu Mahārāja in *Bhāgavata Purāna* IV.19.

17 Lloyd-Jones 1971, 59.

18 Lloyd-Jones 1971, 69.

19 See Shapiro 1996, 350, footnotes 14 and 15.

20 Rémillard 2009/2010, 163.

transgressions which vary in nature and degree. Croesus' transgression is the most benign: he boasted that he was the happiest man in the world. The punishment he received was disproportionately severe: he lost his son to the spear of the ξένος Adrastus. This example provides a clear illustration of the ethico-religious interpretation of φθόνος (approach ii above), since Herodotus explicitly states that Croesus, who had been warned by Solon that the deity is wholly envious,[21] experienced later the god's harsh νέμεσις.[22] Herodotus, however, does not attempt to explain how such νέμεσις could be provoked by the simple boast of a man who, on another occasion, was commended as a god-fearing (θεοσεβής, I.86.10) and virtuous man, dear to the gods (θεοφιλὴς καὶ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός, I.87.11). We must either conclude that simply boasting of one's successes is sure to prove fatal for the boaster – which fits the anthropological interpretation (approach iv above),[23] or that Croesus was in fact punished for something else, e.g., for his aggression against the Greek peoples in Asia Minor.[24]

Xerxes' case is more transparent, because he did disturb the established world order by destroying both human and divine institutions. He receives deserved νέμεσις for his tremendous ὕβρις,[25] being, as he was, unholy and wicked (VIII.109.15). Polycrates, on the other hand, committed wrongs against humans only, at least according to Herodotus' account. He aroused divine φθόνος either because of his treacherous and violent behaviour towards humans,[26] or simply because he was excessively prosperous. In his case, as in Croesus', approaches (ii) and (iv) – and possibly (i) as well – are plausible interpretations of 'the envy of the gods'.

Artabanus' general statements regarding divine φθόνος, made without reference to any particular offender or transgressor, are even more intriguing.[27] He

21 τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν, *Hdt.* I.32.5–6.

22 ἔλαβε ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις μεγάλη Κροῖσον, I.34.1–2.

23 If the 'evil-eye superstition' does indeed play a role here, it is a remnant of a very archaic attitude, which should have been abandoned by Herodotus: 'Belief in divine φθόνος originates from the ancient and undeniably primitive fear that some supernatural being may conceive a spite against one' – and those who brag about their achievements are most likely to provoke it – 'but in such writers as Pindar and Herodotus, it has already developed into a concept of comparatively advanced theology', Lloyd-Jones 1971, 69.

24 See *Hdt.* I.25. If true, this would contradict Mikalson's claim that 'all examples of divine intervention to punish individuals in the *Histories* can be seen to arise from impieties' (2003, 143), i.e., that the gods in the *Histories* are not concerned with justice in general, but only with sacrilege.

25 For some remarks on ὕβρις in the *Histories*, see Mikalson 2003, 153–154.

26 Another case contra Mikalson.

27 Mikalson 2003, 157–16 argues that many of the Persian characters in Herodotus express essentially Greek sentiments and attitudes towards life and religion (for Artabanus, see Mikalson 2003, 160).

warns his nephew Xerxes against adopting an overly confident attitude, and explains that the god is wont to cut short everything that rises to prominence,[28] because he is envious,[29] and as such, will not allow anyone other than himself to be proud or ambitious.[30] Later on, after the launch of their expedition, Artabanus, upon finding Xerxes lamenting the transitory nature of human life, argues that there are much worse things in life than its brevity, and ascribes all the blame to divine φθόνος: the god first gives us a taste of sweet life, but becomes envious of his gift, and takes it all away.[31] None of these statements truly support the notion of non-malicious, just intervention, as Lloyd-Jones would have it; this is especially true of the last one, which is difficult to interpret as anything but as very human-like envy of the happiness of others. Therefore, although we believe that the ethico-religious approach to divine φθόνος is dominant in Herodotus, it is necessary to accept that the author of the *Histories* also retains much of the ancient sense of divine φθόνος – approaches (i) and (iv) above – even if the very broad understanding of ὕβρις suggested by Lloyd-Jones and Rémillard is accepted, and despite Herodotus' 'reformed' understanding of the gods.[32] If it were not so, Plato would not have much reason to criticise the concept, because feeling and displaying rightful νέμεσις in response to human ὕβρις does not endanger a god's divine status.

4.2 Plato's Answer to the Second Profanation

This was, in brief, the second challenge presented by the traditional Homeric religion. Plato brings up that well-engrained 'vulgar notion τὸ θεῖον φθονερόν'[33] in *Timaeus* 29de1–3. These three lines, which contain the word φθόνος and the demonstrative pronoun referring back to it,[34] encapsulate his repudiation of the traditional misconception according to which the gods react to human prosperity with envy. Plato appears to have considered this matter as significant, and yet too trivial to deserve a detailed refutation; he settles it concisely and in a somewhat circular way: God is good, and as such, he cannot

28 φιλέει γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τὰ ὑπερ έχοντα πάντα κολούειν, *Hdt.* VII.10.51–52.

29 ὁ θεὸς φθονήσας, VII.10.53–54.

30 οὐ γὰρ ἐᾷ φρονέειν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον ἢ ἑωυτόν, VII.10.55–56.

31 ὁ δὲ θεὸς γλυκὺν γεύσας τὸν αἰῶνα φθονερὸς ἐν αὐτῷ εὑρίσκεται ἐών, VII.46.18–19.

32 That is, as the gods of the cults in opposition to the 'primitive' gods of the poets. See Mikalson 2003, 111–129.

33 Archer-Hind 1888, 91, n. 13.

34 ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος· τούτου δ' ἐκτὸς ὢν, κτλ.: 'he was good, and in him who is good never arises no envy whatsoever over anything; being thus free from it, etc'.

be envious.[35] The important subject of divine goodness and its cosmological implications will be addressed below, in section 2.2, while presently we shall turn to the emotion behind the term φθόνος – a vice whose presence in the divine Plato strongly denies.

4.2.1 *The Concept of φθόνος in Plato's Theology*

Grasping the proper shade of the meaning of the verb φθονεῖν and its derivatives (like φθονερία, φθόνος), and determining the specific emotion they stand for is not an easy task, especially in the given context, i.e., when the emotion denoted by these words is allegedly experienced by a god. Hence, a few remarks in this regard are certainly in order.

A commonly used translation of φθόνος is 'jealousy',[36] although this rendering is not universally accepted. Taylor, for example, explicitly rejects it: "jealousy' does not quite unambiguously reproduce the force of Plato's word φθόνος, which means, to speak more precisely, the 'dog-in-the-manger' temper which desires to engross all that is good to one's self'.[37] Taylor's objection is probably prompted by some semantic concerns. Namely, the term 'jealousy' is ambivalent in itself: in its most common sense, it is used in a romantic context and may be rightly regarded to refer to a 'three-party relationship', and thus to an emotion clearly distinct from envy and grudge.[38] God's jealousy in Exodus 34:14 ('For the Lord God, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God') perhaps belongs to this type: although no amatory feelings are involved, it betrays

35 'The property of being envious or prone to envy belongs to the bad' is the premise implied here. In the *Phaedrus* myth, 'the vulgar notion ὅτι τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν' (Thompson 1868, 49), is mentioned even more briefly and without any explanation. Socrates is satisfied simply to assert that 'envy remains outside of god's choir' – φθόνος γὰρ ἔξω θείου χοροῦ ἵσταται, *Phdr.* 247a7.

36 Φθόνος in the above passage is translated by Archer-Hind as 'jealousy of aught'; Cornford, as well as Waterfield 2008 and Zeyl 2000 have 'jealousy', and Sallis 1999, 57 'jealousy (envy, ill-will)'. Kalkavage 2001, 60 translates φθόνος as 'grudge' and explains in a note: 'The word for grudge here is φθόνος, which refers to ill will and especially jealousy'. Liddell *et al.* 1996, 1930 also give 'jealousy', alongside with 'ill-will', 'malice' and 'envy'.

37 Taylor 1938, 189. In 1928, 78 he similarly glosses φθόνος as "grudging,' 'dog-in-the-manger' disposition which seeks to engross all that is good for itself'.

38 For jealousy as a triadic emotion and some distinctions between it and envy, see Konstan 2003, 10. See also Sanders 2014, 31: '[Jealousy] necessarily takes place in a three-person scenario (unless possessive rather than sexual jealousy, when one person can be replaced by an object)'. He lists differences between envy and jealousy at 28–29. Sanders' monograph is both an excellent source of information on contemporary scholarship regarding envy and jealousy and a detailed study of these emotions as they appear in the texts of the Classical period. He also successfully distinguishes, defines and precisely describes envy and jealousy.

an intolerance for rivalry in receiving expressions of love and devotion, and an expectation of exclusive faithfulness. The Greek word for 'jealous' in the Septuagint is ζηλωτής, a cognate of ζηλοτυπεῖν, whose primary meaning is 'to be jealous'.[39] Indeed, a similar type of jealousy may be identified among humans, felt against a person perceived to have designs on the person with whom the jealous lover shares a romantic relationship, although this perceived rival has no intention to compete with the jealous lover. Such is the jealousy felt against, e.g., the spouse's same-sex childhood friends. One can even be jealous of a non-human rival, such as a prized possession (the beloved's valuable postage stamps collection, with which he or she spends much time), or the family pet. These are all subtypes of romantic or sexual jealousy.

Plato's Demiurge is certainly not exempt from experiencing the emotion of jealousy in this sense. Yet, the word 'jealousy' presents another nuance and may refer to the so-called possessive jealousy: a feeling triggered by the thought of losing an object which is in one's personal possession (e.g., a rich man is jealous with respect to his precious gems), or of losing a quality or attribute of which one is proud (e.g., a city mayor is jealous with respect to his influence). Nonetheless, despite the various shades and nuances identifiable in the term 'jealousy', it remains essentially attached to the feeling of '[p]ersonal rivalry and fear of loss. It involves a unique bond with a unique individual or item, exclusivity and [fear of] alienation of affection or ownership'.[40] Therefore, it is unlikely that jealousy, in any sense of the meanings described above, should denote an emotion attributable to the traditional gods,[41] even less so to Plato's God in the *Timaeus*. These and similar considerations may be the root of Taylor's dissatisfaction with the term 'jealousy' as a translation of φθόνος. Then how should this term be translated in order to reflect most aptly the emotion it denotes in the *Timaeus*?

This will be best achieved by directly turning to Plato's texts. Herrmann 2003, 58–59 gives a short list of occurrences of φθόνος, and of its opposite ἀφθονία, in dialogues other than the *Timaeus*. He understands ἀφθονία as denoting a magnanimous spirit who does not begrudge disseminating knowledge

39 Although Liddell *et al.* 1996, 755 also give 'to envy' as a synonym.

40 Sanders 2014, 26.

41 That is, when applied to their relations with humans. The Homeric gods do feel jealousy towards their peers. Vivid examples are Hera's jealousy aroused by Zeus' numerous acts of infidelity, and the jealousy between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite as to the possession of beauty, which lead to the Judgement of Paris and the Trojan war. This last episode was narrated in the almost completely lost *Cypria* of the *Epic Cycle*. For a comprehensive analysis of the *Epic Cycle* see West 2013. The *Cypria* is discussed in West 2013, 56–128.

(*Prt.* 320c1–2, *Symp.* 210d6, etc.).[42] The most significant occurrence of φθόνος belongs to the aforementioned assertion in *Phaedrus* 247a7 – φθόνος γὰρ ἔξω θείου χοροῦ ἵσταται, because it, unlike the other examples, refers directly to the gods. Φθόνος reappears in the *Phaedrus*, to indicate a feeling absent from the affectionate relationship between the lover and the beloved: 'They treat their beloved neither with envy, nor with niggardly ill-will'.[43] Fowler 1925, as well as Nehamas and Woodruff 1995, translate φθόνος here as 'jealousy' – seemingly a natural choice, since the word is used in the context of a romantic relationship.[44] However, the overall import of the passage is different, and the translation 'jealousy' could actually hamper the true understanding of the emotion. Socrates continues: 'but they [the lovers] endeavour by every means in their power to lead them [the beloved] to the likeness of the God whom they honour' (253b8–c2). Φθόνος, or more precisely its absence, bears no romantic nuance here; it refers to the true lover's unselfish disposition not to withhold from their beloved the chance to come closer to God, but instead actively to encourage them to emulate the deity. It does not emphasise the lover's lack of feeling of amorous rivalry, but his generosity of spirit when it comes to the distribution of spiritual values. Herrmann, quite reasonably, suggests interpreting the first *Phaedrus* passage, in which the presence of φθόνος in the chorus of the gods is denied, in the light of the second. The absence of φθόνος in these two classes of beings, then, means that: 'The gods, as well as true lovers, do not prevent others from seeing what is in the super-heavenly sphere of true being and reality'.[45] On the other hand, those who are φθονεροί both begrudge bestowing good things and envy the happiness and success of others.[46] This understanding is in accord with Plato's use of the term in the above mentioned passages from the *Protagoras*, the *Symposium*, the *Republic*, as well as with the

42 This is not a general rule. Indeed, the antonym of φθόνος, i.e., ἀφθονία, and its cognates ἄφθονος, ἀφθόνως, are not commonly used by Plato in the sense of 'being without envy', 'unenvious'. The noun ἀφθονία regularly occurs with the meaning 'plenty, abundance' (see, e.g., *Ap.* 23c6, *Prt.* 327b5, *Leg.* 713e2). The adjective ἄφθονος also means 'plentiful, abundant' (see, e.g., *Phd.* 90a9, *Resp.* 363a6, *Plt.* 272b1, *Soph.* 222a10, *Phlb.* 40a10, *Leg.* 713c3), with a single exception: in *Resp.* 500a5 it is applied in the sense of 'ungrudging, unenvious' (person). The adverb ἀφθόνως in *Tim.* 25c6 and in *Leg.* 731a3 means 'generously' and qualifies acts of magnanimity and virtue. The last three instances suitably illustrate the nature and the actions of Plato's gods, who are free from φθόνος.

43 οὐ φθόνῳ οὐδ' ἀνελευ θέρῳ δυσμενείᾳ χρώμενοι πρὸς τὰ παιδικά, 253b7–8.

44 Waterfield 2003 has 'malice'.

45 Herrmann 2003, 58.

46 As Socrates' compatriots felt envy (φθόνος, *Ap.* 28a8) towards him on account of his boldness, uncompromising spirit and success in attracting the attention of the youth of Athens.

two earlier occurrences in the *Timaeus* itself (although these refer to human rather than divine envy): at 23d4–5, in the words of the Egyptian priest: 'I bear no grudge', or 'I do not envy you, O Solon, but I will tell you [the story], for your sake and for the sake of your city';[47] and at 25c6: '[The city of Athens] liberated us all ungrudgingly', or 'without envy'.[48] The translation of φθόνος as 'jealousy' in these two passages would not convey the appropriate meaning.

It is interesting to note that in the Platonic *Definitions* (416a13) the term φθόνος is glossed as λύπη ἐπὶ φίλων ἀγαθοῖς ἢ οὖσιν ἢ γεγενημένοις: 'pain felt on account of the goods of one's friends, either present or past'. Aristotle, in *Rhetoric* 1387b22–26, expresses the same idea in a more elaborate manner:

> Envy is a kind of pain at the apparent success regarding the goods mentioned, directed at equals, and not for the sake of possessing something, but because others have it. For such men feel envy toward those who are, or seem to be, their equals.

The Stoics' definition is shorter: 'envy [φθόνος] is a pain at other people's goods'.[49] The Academic and Aristotelian proviso that φθόνος is a type of pain caused by the sight of those *equal to oneself* may seem incompatible with the notion of θεῶν φθόνος, since mortals and gods may in no circumstance be considered equals, and indeed, this is the core of the issue. Both Plato and Aristotle[50] consider φθόνος to be utterly incompatible with divine nature, and emphatically denied that it may exist within the celestial sphere. In *Philebus* 47e–50c, this emotion (alongside with anger, fear, longing, lamentation, sexual desire, jealousy, etc.) is described as the primary pain of the soul (47e3, 48b8–9, 50a7–8), occasionally mixed with pleasure. As such, it is absolutely and obviously unbecoming for a god. *Menexenus* 242a and *Laws* 730e–731b describe envy as an inherently human character trait, that disrupts both political stability and the individual and collective pursuit of virtue. Indeed, there is a long tradition of understanding φθόνος as a base emotion, cultivated by lowly persons of bad character; Aristotle also adopts this definition in, e.g., *Rhet.* 1388a35–36 and *Eth. Nic.* 1107a9–12.[51]

47 Φθόνος οὐδείς, ὦ Σόλων, ἀλλὰ σοῦ τε ἕνεκα ἐρῶ καὶ τῆς πόλεως ὑμῶν.

48 ἀφθόνως ἅπαντας ἠλευθέρωσεν.

49 Quoted in Konstan 2003, 13.

50 For the latter see p. 116 above.

51 Still, the concept of θεῶν φθόνος is undoubtedly present in earlier authors (Pindar, Aeschylus, Herodotus, etc.). Walcot 1978, 3 offers a cultural and anthropological explanation for this: 'The gods were going to envy individual mortals only when there were mortal men whose powers might seem to approach those of the gods themselves, and such men

Thus, in the case of Plato's gods in *Phaedrus* 247c, and of his creator-god in *Timaeus* 29e, the utter absence of φθόνος reflect their disposition, respectively, freely to allow and even to encourage emulation (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ), and to make everything as similar to the divine as possible.[52] Both the gods and the Demiurge, being perfectly good, are devoid of φθόνος – the selfish urge to begrudge the bestowal of good things, and to envy those who aspire to emulate their level of goodness as much as possible.

However, this does not preclude the objection that the emotion which Plato claims to be absent in the Demiurge should be understood as jealousy in its second, possessive meaning. There are considerable terminological and, at least apparently, phenomenological overlaps between envy and jealousy, while φθόνος does seems to have been used with the meaning of possessive jealousy.[53] Nevertheless, 'while φθόνος does include jealous possession, this crops up considerably less frequently than envy', and therefore 'the large majority of instances of φθόνος-words are translatable as 'envy' or '(be)grudging', or some combination thereof'.[54] Furthermore, since the Greek language already contains a term for jealousy (ζηλοτυπία), which seems not to have been considered to be synonymous with φθόνος,[55] it may be prudent, at least in Plato's case, to reserve the translation 'to be jealous' to ζηλοτυπεῖν, and to adopt 'to envy' or 'to begrudge' as the closest English equivalents for φθονεῖν – thus avoiding the ambiguity of the word 'jealousy'. The concept of φθόνος, from which Plato absolves his Demiurge, may then be more precisely defined.

The occurrence of ζηλοτυπεῖν and φθονεῖν side by side in a passage from the *Symposium* suggests that Plato himself felt that the two verbs are not synonymous, and that they denote different emotions. The context of this passage is

became known in the Greek world when the Greeks encountered for the first time eastern potentates; at that time kings became rivals and not the protégés of the gods as they are in the *Iliad*'.

52 This is not to say that the divide between the divine and the human is not absolute; ὁμοίωσις θεῷ does not mean becoming a god but becoming godlike in character and behaviour. Yet, when the need for further divine entities arises, the supreme deity of the *Timaeus* does not falter; he ungrudgingly turns both the universe and his helpers into immortal gods.

53 See Sanders 2014, 33. Walcot 1978, 2–7 is more resolute, and opts for 'envy' as the almost exclusive rendering of φθόνος.

54 Walcot 1978, 58.

55 Aristotle does not provide a definition, but the Stoics do: 'ζηλοτυπία is a pain at someone else having what one desires oneself' (DL VII.111–112) – not an emotion that Plato's Demiurge is liable to experiencing. Cf. DL VII.131, where ζηλοτυπία clearly means 'amorous jealousy'. For the various nuances of meaning in ζηλοτυπεῖν and ζηλοτυπία and substantial references to works on the subject, see Konstan 2003.

Alcibiades' arrival at the end of Socrates' concluding speech. Socrates implores Agathon to protect him from Alcibiades' intemperate behaviour, and explains that, when Alcibiades notices him so much as glancing towards another attractive man, οὑτοσὶ ζηλοτυπῶν με καὶ φθονῶν θαυμαστὰ ἐργάζεται καὶ λοιδορεῖταί τε καὶ τὼ χεῖρε μόγις ἀπέχεται (*Symp*. 213d2–4). English translations of this sentence are varied, and therefore of little help for establishing the exact meaning of the two words. Jowett 1996 unexpectedly proposes '[h]e goes wild with *envy* and *jealousy*, and not only abuses me but can hardly keep his hands off me'.[56] Fowler 1925 suggests '[t]he fellow flies into a *spiteful jealousy* which makes him treat me in a monstrous fashion, girding at me and hardly keeping his hands to himself', while Nehamas and Woodruff 1989 opt for: '[h]e falls into a fit of *jealous rage*.[57] He yells; he threatens; he can hardly keep from slapping me around!'. The concern of the last two translations especially seems to be style rather than accuracy. Didot 1856 does preserve accuracy, by providing, as Latin equivalents of ζηλοτυπῶν and φθονῶν, *zelotypus* and *invidens*, the respective translations of which – 'jealous' and 'envious, grudging' – reflect the primary meaning of each Greek word.[58] And because the Latin adjective *zelotypus* is obviously derived from the Greek, it is reasonable to assume that it has preserved its original sense.

These observations sufficiently justify Taylor's claim that the emotion denoted by the word φθόνος is indeed not jealousy. His 'dog-in-the-manger' is, however, not accurate either; the phrase refers to a person who selfishly withholds from others things he or she *cannot or does not need* to use,[59] and such petty selfishness does not feature in the accusation raised against the gods. Hence, to conclude, the phthonic attitude – a trait resolutely presented by Plato as incompatible with the Demiurge and the gods – may be understood as a mixture of envy for the goods and privileges others possess, and of the urge to begrudge bestowing upon the others the goods that a person himself enjoys.[60]

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56 Here, as well as in the following quotations, the emphases are added.

57 Larson 1980 too has '*jealous rage*', while Howatson 2008 renders οὑτοσὶ ζηλοτυπῶν με καὶ φθονῶν as 'this man here gets *jealous* and *resentful*'.

58 Cf. *Phlb.* 47e1: καὶ ζῆλον καὶ φθόνον = *aemulationem, invidiam*, and 50c1: καὶ ζῆλον καὶ φθόνον = *aemulationem, invidiam*. Frede 1993 renders the terms as 'jealousy' and 'malice'; Hackford 1945 as 'emulation' and 'malice'. *Leg.* 679c1: ζῆλοί τε αὖ καὶ φθόνοι οὐκ ἐγγίγνονται = *nec rursus aemulatione aut invidia inflammantur animi*; in Saunders' 1970 English translation: 'and feelings of jealousy and envy simply do not arise'.

59 Like a dog lying in a manger and thus preventing the horses from eating hay it neither wants nor needs.

60 For the Homeric meaning of φθονεῖν, φθόνος, see Herrmann 2003, 73; for both the archaic and classical usages of the word, see Sanders 2014, 33–46. For a tentative etymology of φθόνος, see Herrmann 2003, 80. For an interpretation of φθόνος that involves a wider range

4.2.2 *Divine Goodness and the 'Why a World at All?' Question*

This should suffice as an analysis of the emotion behind the concept of divine envy. Plato's denial of such property in God, and his affirmation of God's goodness occurs immediately after the eponymous narrator of the dialogue winds up his Proem (27c–29d), which abounds with important ideas and sets the course for the rest of his discourse. In the Proem, Timaeus first makes a distinction, inspired by quintessential Platonic ontology, between that which always is and has no becoming, and that which is perpetually becoming, and never truly is[61] – the former being intelligible by nature, the latter, sensible. Next, he claims that the world, because it is sensible, must have had a cause for its becoming. This cause is the maker and father (ποιητὴς καὶ πατήρ) of all,[62] difficult to find and, once found, impossible to describe to everyone (28c3–5).[63] Finally, Timaeus explains that the father and maker creates the world by looking at an eternal model, which is obvious from the facts that this world is beautiful, and the Demiurge himself, good (καλός ἐστιν ὅδε ὁ κόσμος ὅ τε δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός, 29a2–3).[64]

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of meanings and also includes jealousy, see Dickie 1993, 382. Nevertheless, when it comes to the restricted sense of the φθόνος from which the Demiurge is absolved, he writes the following: 'The Divine Demiurge is free from the φθόνος that resents sharing goods with others, and he also has no share in the φθόνος that cannot bear to see someone else enjoying some good'. The most recent, and rather comprehensive, treatment of the emotion of φθόνος in Plato is Brisson 2020. He renders the word as 'envious jealousy' and defines it as a mix of feelings of joy at the misfortunes of others, and sadness on account of their prosperity.

61 τί τὸ ὂν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν, 27d6–28a1. Cf. *Bhagavad-gītā* 11.16: 'The seers of the truth have observed that for non-being there is no continuance, while for being there is no cessation of existence (*nāsato vidyate bhāvo, nābhāvo vidhate satah*). This they have concluded after studying the nature of both'. The 'non-being' and 'being' here are Plato's Becoming and Being, respectively.

62 For prominent Middle Platonic interpretations, as well as for Plotinus' understanding of this nomenclature, see Vorwerk 2010.

63 The cause in question is, of course, the Demiurge.

64 The Proem thus contains at least three crucial theses, which will recur, and be partly developed by Timaeus during his exposition. These are: (a) Plato's well-known Two-World Theory, along with its epistemological implications; (b) the idea that fashioning a good product requires a fixed model, necessary to the craftsman during production (see also, e.g., *Crat.* 389b, *Resp.* 596b); (c) the conception, rarely expressed before Plato's late period, that the cause of the world of Becoming is the Demiurge, a rational agent assuming the form of a personal deity. The first occurrence of this conception is probably in *Republic* 530a6, 'the craftsman of the heavens'. The idea of divine craftsmanship is also present in *Soph.* 265c–266d, *Plt.* 269c–273e, in which the originator and helmsman of the cosmos is called, among else, τοῦ δημιουργοῦ καὶ πατρὸς (273b1–2), as well as in *Phlb.* 26e–27b. On the Demiurge, see Ilievski 2022. On Timaeus' Proem, see Cornford 1997 [1937], 21–28.

This preliminary discourse receives Socrates' whole-hearted approval (29d4–6). Timaeus then introduces an issue that would continue to perplex generations of thinkers: why would God create a world at all?[65] This question, which may be reformulated as 'why is the sensible world's existence necessary?', or 'why would a good God want to create an inferior world besides the already existing Intelligible one?'[66] comes as a prelude to the theodicean ideas embedded in the *Timaeus*. Plato suggests the following answer:

> Let us, then, declare for what reason the maker put together Becoming and this All: he was good, and in him, who is good, no envy whatsoever for anything ever arises (ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος, 29e1–2); being thus free from envy, he desired everything to become as closely similar to him as possible (τούτου δ› ἐκτὸς ὢν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ, 29e2–3). Someone who would accept from men of wisdom that this is, above all else, the supreme principle of becoming, and the cosmos, would be wholly right in accepting it. (29d8–30a2)

As evident from the quoted text, Plato's answer to the question 'why a world at all?' is direct and unambiguous: the reason behind the universe's becoming

65 Among the challenges that Cicero's Velleius the Epicurean launches against Plato's artisan-god and his creative work in the *Timaeus*, as well as against the Stoic concept of πρόνοια (*Nat. D.* 1.18–24), is also the question what prompted the deity to initiate the process of creation at all: 'why did these world-builders suddenly emerge after lying asleep for countless generations?' (*Nat. D.* 1.21). In these passages, Velleius, in opposition to many ancient Platonists, assumes that the cosmos of the *Timaeus* was created at a particular point in time (among the Platonists, Plutarch and Atticus are the most notable champions of this view; see Sedley 2007, 107). This is a complex issue. We believe that Plato took the act of creation as a 'historical' fact, although it did not happen in time, since time did not exist before the beginning of the universe. More importantly, Velleius neglects the conspicuous fact that Plato's Demiurge, compelled by his innate goodness, *had no choice* but to act, in order to bring the undifferentiated visible realm from a state of discord to a state of harmony. Velleius' questions may be more relevantly posed to a Christian theologian, since no corporeality of any kind exists before God's act of creation, which makes it more challenging to conceive how the imperfect product of that act would contribute to the excellence of the whole. The same objection does not apply to Plato, since the Demiurge's work on the primordial stuff clearly results in a significant improvement. Cf. Zeyl 2000, xxxvi.

66 Plato's question is a theistic version of the more general metaphysical question 'Why something rather than nothing?'. The latter has received, and continues to receive, a lot of attention. Rundle 2004, Goldschmidt 2013, offer valuable explorations of this problem. For a discussion of the meaning of the question itself, see Brenner 2016.

and sustenance is the goodness of the Demiurge, who is its creative and ruling principle, utterly free from the unbecoming emotion of φθόνος, or envy.[67] In other words, the Demiurge fashioned this world out of the pre-existing material because he wanted to create something better out of something worse. The Demiurge, because he is devoid of φθόνος and pre-eminently good, always desires to share everything of value in his possession with everything that he creates. In doing so, he makes both the world as a whole, and each of its individual parts, as similar to himself as possible.[68] He perceives and appropriates a realm given to discord and disorder (i.e., characterised by faulty and disorderly motion – κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως, 30a4–5), and brings it from disorder to order, considering the latter to be in every way better (εἰς τάξιν αὐτὸ ἤγαγεν ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας, ἡγησάμενος ἐκεῖνο τούτου πάντως ἄμεινον, 30a5–6). This is his primary goal: to produce order and hence goodness,[69] to turn the proverbial chaos into cosmos, a task which he accomplishes by imparting his own properties to the world.[70] God's most valuable assets are immortality and rationality or wisdom,[71] and he bestows them with perfect benevolence.[72] He grants immortality to the universe (37d, 39e), the gods (41a–b) and to the soul,

67 Ferrari 2022, L also emphasises that the supreme principle of the creation is God's goodness and absence of φθόνος, and relates this assertion to Socrates' refusal to ascribe reprehensible passions to the gods in *Republic* II. He also claims that, in this passage of the *Timaeus*, Plato puts into practice the first of his τύποι περὶ θεολογίας expounded in the *Republic*. Regali 2012, 128–131 makes the same connection.

68 *Tim.* 29e3: πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ. This does not mean that the Demiurge should be identified with the Paradigm, to the likeness of which the world has been constructed. For a brief rebuttal of this thesis, see Guthrie 1978, 260–261.

69 This is an old postulate, which Plato elucidated already in *Grg.* 503d–507a, most emphatically stated at 506e2–3: Κόσμος τις ἄρα ἐγγενόμενος ἐν ἑκάστῳ ὁ ἑκάστου οἰκεῖος ἀγαθὸν παρέχει ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων – it is that specific order apposite to each thing which makes every being good after appearing in it. The world itself is a cosmos, but not on its own merit: it has been made such by the benevolent intervention of the Demiurge.

70 See Mohr 1985 for the view that the Demiurge's interventions are aimed at epistemological end, i.e., that he improves the world's intelligibility, and thus facilitates forming true opinions about it.

71 See *Phlb.* 30c, where Plato uses σοφία and νοῦς as synonymous appellations for the cause that brings together Limit and Unlimited.

72 For Sedley 1999, 798 rationality is the sole criterion for establishing likeness with the divine: 'This likeness amounts to the controlling presence of intelligence, all the way down from the world-soul to the lowest level of particle physics, taking in the human soul on the way'. Interestingly, Aristotle, in *Metaph.* 982b32–983a4 proposes the following counterfactual: were God indeed envious, as the poets say, he would be most grudging in bestowing wisdom, his most highly prized possession; but since he is not so, men are entitled to aspire to it. One of the implications of this observation is that we become as godlike as possible precisely by cultivating reason or wisdom.

both cosmic and individual. He also gives νοῦς to the cosmos – by endowing it with supremely rational soul (30b–c) – and to the individual souls (90a), so that they can emulate the divine and become as godlike as possible, the ultimate end of all philosophical endeavours. These acts of selfless improving and organising, whose facticity is deducible from the world's overall orderliness and beauty, are the ultimate proof of God's ungrudging attitude, of his freedom from envy and of his goodness, as well as of the role of divine providence in making the world come into being.[73] Furthermore, these acts result in both macrocosm and microcosm becoming good and blessed insofar as the Demiurge's immortal and rational nature is imparted to them. Finally, Plato reiterates the message conveyed by *Republic* 379b:[74] benevolence is inseparable from God, because the very nature of the good prevents it from doing anything but what is fair and beneficial.[75]

For these reasons, no separate effort is made in the *Timaeus* to substantiate by argument the assertion that God is good (and therefore free of φθόνος).[76] As a matter of fact, at the end of the passage first introducing the divine craftsman of the universe (28a–29b), Plato inserts a protasis which may first appear as the premise of a deductive argument for establishing God's benevolence: 'if this cosmos is beautiful and the craftsman good, then it is clear that he gazed at the everlasting [model]' (29a2–3). But instead of having recourse to a structured argument, Plato asserts the apodosis by *argumentum ad baculum* and *petitio principii*: since it is impossible to formulate the contrary proposition without committing blasphemy, and since the protasis is true, the apodosis must be true.[77]

Elsewhere, however, Plato evokes the beauty and orderliness of the universe – which he takes as self-evident – to construct an *a posteriori* argument for God's goodness. It occurs in *Laws* 897c–898c, and is basically a variant of the Argument from Design, although it does not aim at proving God's existence, but his

73 διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσθαι πρόνοιαν, 30b8–c1.

74 See pp. 31–32 above.

75 'It neither was, nor is permissible for the best to perform anything but the most noble': θέμις δ' οὔτ' ἦν οὔτ' ἔστιν τῷ ἀρίστῳ δρᾶν ἄλλο πλὴν τὸ κάλλιστον, 30a6–7.

76 See also Regali 2012, 129: 'Sia nel *Timeo* sia nel II libro della *Repubblica*, la bontà del dio è un postulato, un assunto che non debe essere dimostrato, dal quale dipende la catena argomentativa che nel suo primo anello attribuisce al dio l'estraneità allo φθόνος: il racconto di Timeo corregge i racconti dei poeti'.

77 'If otherwise, which is blasphemous even to say, about that which has come to be': εἰ δὲ ὃ μηδ' εἰπεῖν τινι θέμις, πρὸς γεγονός, 29a3–4; for the cosmos is 'the fairest of things that come to be, and the Demiurge is the best of causes': ὁ μὲν γὰρ κάλλιστος τῶν γεγονότων, ὁ δ' ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων, 29a5–6.

property of being pre-eminently good.[78] The gist of the argument is as follows: since the motion of the heavens is orderly, regular, and in accordance with reason, and since Soul, or God, presides over it, this God has to be rational and supremely virtuous, i.e., good.[79] Although the deity of this passage of the *Laws*, being a soul, cannot be equated with the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*,[80] they are both strongly connected to the property of orderliness, i.e., they both share the desire and ability to impose and maintain order.

4.3 Theodicy in the *Timaeus*

The assertion of God's goodness, benevolence, and providential care for the universe generates the notorious problem of the presence of both moral and physical badness in a world arranged and managed by such a supreme source of excellence. A profoundly religious thinker, Plato is well aware of this challenge, and offers in the *Timaeus* valuable remarks that may be considered as starting points, but also further developments, for several possible answers to the problem of evil. This section identifies three of these answers, or theodicean strategies: the Principle of Plenitude, the already known Solution from Personal Responsibility, and the Recalcitrant Entity Solution.[81] They pertain also, respectively, to the question of the unjustified overabundance of

78 Earlier on (*Leg.* 886a2–4), the Athenian's interlocutor Clinias invoked a very brief version of the Argument from Design as an easy proof for God's existence. Plato, however, feared it unreliable due to the confusion created by the speculations of the natural philosophers (886a–e), and presented his own *a priori* proof, a line of reasoning that relies on the concept of self-generated motion (893b–899c). Plato's reservations, however, have not prevented the Design Argument from becoming one of the most important tools of the theologians, both in Antiquity (see, e.g., the elaborate Socratic argument in *Mem.* 1.4; Cicero, *Nat. D.* II.15) and in modernity.

79 The argument once again opens with a conditional: 'If [...] both the entire course and movement of the heavens and all entities that are in it resemble the nature of the motion and revolution and calculation of reason [...] then, clearly, we must say that it is the best kind of soul that cares for the whole universe and directs it along this path, which is the best' (897c). The motion of the heavens, being regular and ordered, exhibits the closest possible affinity with the movement of reason, and thus the apodosis is easily confirmed. A few pages later, Plato also 'proves' that God's goodness manifests itself as his caring concern for the welfare of the universe and its inhabitants (899d–905d).

80 Nevertheless, the *highest God* of the *Laws* is, once again, Intellect. See pp. 29-30 above and p. 177 below.

81 The first and third strategies have their origin in the *Timaeus*, while the second was introduced in *Republic* X. Plato's theodicy will have its continuation and culmination in *Laws* X.

life-forms in the world, to the problem of moral evil, and to the problem of natural or physical evil.

4.3.1 *The Principle of Plenitude*

Now that he has answered the question 'why the world at all?', and before he addresses the problem of explaining the presence of badness in a universe fashioned by an omnibenevolent deity, Plato, deliberately or spontaneously, turns to another issue presenting strong theodicean implications. This issue is best expressed by the question 'if the world must exist, why does it have to be so complex and full of variety?'. Would not the God of the *Timaeus* have exemplified his all-good nature much more effectively if he had limited his demiurgic impulse and fashioned only the World Soul and the lesser gods? Would not the cosmos be a better place if it was inhabited by gods only? What does the vast variety of creatures add to the completeness and perfection of the whole? For this is what Plato explicitly claims at 41b7–8: 'three mortal kinds are still left unbegotten, and unless they come into being, the universe will remain incomplete'.[82] The problem with the variety in the world is that diversity often implies inequality: some creatures will be stronger than others, some more beautiful, some faster, some bigger, some bolder, some more intelligent. Some will be deprived of any beneficial trait. Instead of accommodating only the most excellent, the world is infested with scorpions, cockroaches, bedbugs, and, after all, humans. This distribution of powers and qualities, and deficiencies thereof, seems at first glance arbitrary, and therefore unjust.[83]

82 There are, all together, four types of living entities in the universe, classified according to their habitats: gods, living in the fiery regions; airborne creatures; creatures inhabiting the waters; creatures living on dry land (39e10–40a2). The last three types are, of course, mortal, while the first type, a superb creation of the Demiurge himself, although not intrinsically indissoluble, has received from its creator the blessing never to suffer death and dissolution (41b).

83 Protagoras' myth, related in Plato's dialogue of the same name (*Prt.* 320c8–322d5), gives the impression that the non-human animals were carefully provided by Epimetheus with different sets of powers appropriate for each species, and that the distribution might not have been neither arbitrary nor unjust. However, the allocation of powers in the myth is performed with a view on survival of the species, which does not exclude the potentially unnecessary suffering of the individuals. The fact that their species will not be exterminated offers little solace to the five little rabbits who are about to be eaten by a fox. For detailed presentation of the problem of variety of life-forms as a theodicean one, see Hick 2010, 70–82.

Now, it is these concerns[84] that Plato addresses at 39e3–40a2 and 41b7–c2.[85] He does not attempt to offer a response to the inquiries 'why was the human race, of all things, part of the craftsman's good plan?',[86] and 'why must mortal creatures be part of the creation?';[87] even though related to the main issue, they are not directly evoked in the above passages. Instead, he provides an answer to the question 'why does the world need to contain such a variety of life forms?'. Plato does not claim that 'the universe has to contain human beings with rational souls in order to be perfect',[88] or that 'it must possess mortal beings in order to be perfect',[89] but proposes that the world 'needs to contain each kind of living entities there is in the Paradigm in order to imitate it perfectly'.[90] Thus, his reply to a highly complex issue, though rather dogmatic, is simple and straightforward: this universe was fashioned in the likeness of an eternal model (28a–29b); that model is the Living Being, comprising within itself all intelligible ζῷα, *both individually and by kind* (30c5–8); the maker of the cosmos, being good (29e1), wanted his creation to be as similar as possible to the most excellent model (30d1–3, 39e); therefore, he made it as a single, all-inclusive copy, also containing all existent kinds of ζῷα (30d3–31a1). If the cosmos had not included them all, it would not have been a perfect replica of the perfect Paradigm (39e, 41b8–41c2). The principle of variety is thus not applied capriciously to this world, but it naturally conforms with the commonsense idea that a copy, in order to be so, must imitate the original in each significant detail, and with the well-known Platonic tenet that the reason for the existence of the sensible world lies in the world of Intellect.

84 Which are, as a matter of fact, not stated, but only implied.

85 In short: the Demiurge determined that the universe should possess as many sorts of entities as are contained in the Living Creature that really is; and, unless the remaining three mortal kinds are born, the universe will remain incomplete, because it will lack all the kinds it needs to have in order to be perfect.

86 Broadie 2001, 8.

87 As Taylor 1928, 253 assumes.

88 As Broadie 2012, 90 does: '[t]hat reason's self-development from within a mortal body assaulted by forces not friendly to reason is just the kind of things without which the world would be incomplete'. Her point, although not invalid, is not directly addressed in the above passages.

89 As far as the necessity of the existence of mortal kinds is concerned, Taylor 1928, 253, who considers that most of the religious and metaphysical ideas expounded in the *Timaeus* are of Pythagorean origin, claims that the mortal and the immortal had to be present in the good cosmos as constituents of one of the basic pairs of opposites. Archer-Hind's 1888, 140 is more accurate: 'To materiality belongs becoming and perishing: accordingly, αἰσθητά ζῷα, the copies of the νοητά ζῷα, must, as far as material, be mortal'.

90 With which Cornford 1997 [1937], 141 seems to agree, since he comments neither on humanity nor on mortality.

Arthur Lovejoy, an eminent scholar of the last century, saw in Plato's justification of the existence of the world, and of its fullness and diversity, the emergence of an important philosophical thesis which he called the 'Principle of Plenitude', later appropriated and implemented in the theodicies of Plotinus and St. Augustine. Applied to Timaeus' story, it may be formulated as follows: since existence is better than non-existence, and since the Demiurge would not begrudge existence to any being that might conceivably possess it, the created cosmos will instantiate each and every ζῷον contained in the paradigmatic Living Creature. Lovejoy himself describes the Principle of Plenitude as

> the thesis that the universe is a *plenum formarum* in which the range of conceivable diversity of *kinds* of living things is exhaustively exemplified [...], that no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled, that the extent and abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence and commensurate with the productive capacity of a 'perfect' and inexhaustible Source, and that the world is the better, the more things it contains.[91]

The application of this concept to Plato does not suit all scholars. Sarah Broadie extensively criticises Lovejoy's treatment 'of the question to which the *Timaeus* ought to suggest an answer'.[92] However, as already mentioned, Broadie understands that question to be 'why are humans part of the divine plan?' – not the question to which Lovejoy offers his Principle of Plenitude as an answer. Indeed, he expressly states that the question under scrutiny is 'How many kinds of temporal and imperfect beings must this world contain?',[93] or, in other words, 'if a world, why so diverse?', and quotes the two passages from the *Timaeus* paraphrased in footnote 85 above as the Platonic answer to this question.[94] Thus, the formulation of the Principle of Plenitude, which follows the quotations almost immediately, may be received as a succinct elucidation of the *Timaeus* passages, and undoubtedly represents the appropriate answer to the question that Lovejoy and, in all probability, Plato intended to pose.

It does not ensue that each and every element of Lovejoy's answer, and of its corollaries, accurately reflect Plato's own views. For example, Plato never

91 Lovejoy 1936, 52.

92 Broadie 2001, 8. Another voice of dissent is Hintikka's. He claims that Plato 'never embraced the Principle as an unqualified philosophical thesis', Hintikka 1975–1976, 30, and also challenges Lovejoy's interpretation of the Principle.

93 Lovejoy 1936, 50.

94 See Lovejoy 1936, 50–51.

suggests that the very overabundance of beings makes the world superior to another possible world populated by fewer entities, as Lovejoy seems to imply when he writes 'the world is the better, the more things it contains'. Similarly, his assertion that 'The Intellectual World was declared to be deficient without the sensible. Since a God unsupplemented by nature in all its diversity would not be 'good', it followed that he would not be divine',[95] is supported neither by the *Timaeus*, nor by any other Platonic text. Indeed, Broadie offers some convincing arguments against this conjecture, and adequately challenges some other errors in Lovejoy's account.[96] Nevertheless, she takes her case too far by denying any value to the Principle of Plenitude. Besides her misreading of the question to which it is meant to be an answer, she neglects to quote the main statement of the Principle, and focuses instead on corollaries like the above.[97] In addition, in her discussion of *Timaeus* 39e3– 40a2 and 41b7–c2, she writes that these passages support Lovejoy's thesis only insofar as they show that 'the all-inclusiveness of the visible cosmos is nothing more than the fact that it lacks nothing on the visible level that is present in the intelligible archetype'.[98] But there is no need for the passages to show anything else, because this is the very purpose of the statement of the Principle of Plenitude, when applied to Plato: to lead us to the conclusion that the creator and the world are such that they do not allow for any genuine potentiality of being to remain unfulfilled. This plain fact may have escaped Broadie because she appears to come to a conclusion about the content of the Paradigm by looking at the copy: 'For this classification [of intelligible kinds] rests on the necessarily exhaustive division of the materials of the universe into earth, fire, water and air, and the corresponding division of regions'.[99] Plato's argument is, however, the reverse: 'because the Model contains these types, the cosmos, to be complete, must contain them too'.[100] Thus, we may conclude that Plato's answer to the issue of the heterogeneity of the cosmos is in conformity with a slightly restricted form of the Principle of Plenitude.[101]

95 Lovejoy 1936, 52–53.
96 For her arguments, see Broadie 2001, 11.
97 Broadie 2001, 10–13.
98 Broadie 2001, 14.
99 Broadie 2001, 14.
100 Guthrie 1978, 305. Plotinus provides a similar explanation of the universe's variety and of the conflicts between the individuals inhabiting it; see *Enn.* III.2.4.17–20.
101 This brief discussion of the Principle of Plenitude in Plato does not address the larger problem of the justification of the paradigmatic Living Creature's inner complexity and fullness. More broadly conceived, this issue leads to the question of the plurality and interconnectedness of Forms in the Intelligible world. This subject cannot be fully

This notwithstanding, Broadie's insistence on the eminence of humanity within the world of the *Timaeus* holds independent value. Timaeus' task was, after all, to relate the story of creation, starting from the birth of the cosmos, and ending with an account of the nature of mankind (27a5–6). Humans are the most exalted among living beings other than gods, because of their ability to exercise reason, an ability that is very much dimmed in the rest of the mortal species.[102] Besides, humans, through the phenomenon of degradation of consciousness, may almost be considered as the 'creators' of the non-human animals:[103] when a soul incarnated in a human body becomes morally corrupt, and therefore unworthy of the responsibility inherent to the gift of the full ability to exercise reason, it is transferred into a lesser body, appropriate for the lustful, avaricious, etc., inclinations acquired by such a soul (42a–d, 91d–92c).[104] Since the immortal souls, created by the Demiurge, and each assigned to a

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addressed here, but it is worth noting that ancient Platonists rarely saw the contents of Plato's Paradigm as problematic, regardless of their own conception of it. Plotinus, for example, offers a very simple reason for the vast variety of discernible living creatures within it: 'Since we maintain that this All exists after the pattern (so to call it) of that, the universal living being must exist there too first, and, if its existence is to be complete, must be all living beings' (*Enn.* VI.7.12.1–4, tr. Armstrong 1988). This interpretation is developed and supported by further arguments in VI.7.7–15. The same idea is expressed by Parry 1991, who takes the variety of Forms within the αὐτὸ τὸ ζῷον as necessary, if it is to serve as the proper model to the created cosmos. Cornford 1997 [1937], 40–41 claims that the paradigmatic Living Creature does not represent the Intelligible world in general, but contains only the Forms of immortal and mortal species that appear in our world, while Taylor 1928, 80–82 believes that it encompasses the complete system of Forms. For a very different interpretation, see Thein 2006, who states that the Living Creature consists of four Forms only. The conclusion of the most recent discussion of the Paradigm, in Ferrari 2022, LIV–LX, is that it should be identified with the entire world of Forms in its dynamic and holistic mode, as explained in the *Sophist*.

102 For an argument that all non-human animals are intelligent, see Carpenter 2008, 47–52. Her view that they are also capable of reordering the circles of the Same and the Different, is more difficult to accept. For the relation of plants to intelligence, as deduced from the *Timaeus*, see Carpenter 2010.

103 By projecting the suitable mentality; the bodies themselves are fashioned by the lesser gods. For Plato's (de)evolutionary zoology, see Gregory 2007, 151–153.

104 The text of the *Timaeus* presents this degradation as inevitable. For instance, the body of a snail exists to accommodate a specific degree of decline in the quality of human rationality. Since it is instantiated in this world, such a life-form must be represented in the Paradigm, and because this perfect replica mirrors its model in the best way possible, the snail-body is bound to appear. Thus, the degradation of the soul is induced by two types of necessity: the first one stemming from the structure of the Intellectual Paradigm, the second one from the presence of materiality. This may be taken as an illustration of Plato's lack of faith in humanity: he is aware that only the rare few will walk the path of spiritual exaltation and salvation.

particular star (41d8–e1), are bound to become incarnate,[105] the human form holds the key to the 'rational victory' and 'rational achievement',[106] or their opposite, on a micro level.[107] Through the image of the Demiurge instructing the souls-to-be-incarnated, and warning them of the perils awaiting embodied beings (41e–42c), Plato emphasises the true value and responsibility of human life.

4.3.2 *The Solution from Personal Responsibility*

The section of the *Timaeus* that describes the composition of the human souls, their 'sowing' in the planets, the construction of their bodies and inferior soul parts by the demigods, etc. (41d–42e), is also significant for the question of theodicy in the dialogue, because Plato, in some of these passages, has recourse to the theodicean strategy elaborated in the Myth of Er. At this point of the *Timaeus*, the veil of myth grows very thick[108] and often obscures Plato's intentions, and yet the theodicean motif remains clear. The Demiurge turns to the same κρατήρ in which he mixed the ingredients of the cosmic soul, but now uses inferior materials, so that the individual souls may have similar cognitive capacities, but also be fallible (41d).[109] He divides the soul-stuff into portions equalling the number of the fixed stars, assigns each soul to a particular star,

105 Maybe owing to the second and third grade of purity of the material from which they were fashioned (41d3–4), or simply because such is the law of necessity (42a3–4).

106 As Broadie names the individual struggle with psychic disorderliness in 2001, 20 and 2012, 104–109.

107 This is to say that human beings have every opportunity to make the right choices to perfect and elevate themselves up to their 'original condition of excellence' (42d2), while the animals either lack this prospect, or only have it in a limited form. Carpenter 2008 argues for the latter; we favour the former alternative and submit that a soul which was once in an animal body becomes capable of re-ordering the circles of the Same and the Different only after it is reborn in a human body – as per the Indian karma-reincarnation doctrine. Plato makes it clear that he is not opposed to the idea of both-ways-inter-species-transmigration in the *Republic*'s Myth of Er (620a). This is even more apparent in *Phaedo* 82b5–8, where the souls of moderate but unphilosophical men are said to transmigrate into some social and tame species (like bees and ants), and then back to human body (καὶ εἰς ταὐτόν γε πάλιν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον γένος, 82b7). However, the mechanism by which a soul inhabiting an animal body may be propelled upwards remains a mystery, unless we turn again to the (broad and imprecise) notion of karmic law for help.

108 See Cornford 1997 [1937], 143.

109 Again, such a situation is desirable because it represents one of the conditions for the unfolding of the creation in its various aspects: a fallible soul embodied in a human form is prone to slide down the cycle of transmigration, and thus indirectly create the bodies of other animal species. This is confirmed in *Tim*. 91d–92c, where the animal forms are depicted as vehicles meant to accommodate various degrees of degraded human consciousness.

and mounts them on the stars as if on chariots.[110] The souls are then allowed to contemplate the nature of the universe, and instructed in the laws of destiny (41d–e).[111] The first law is especially significant: the initial birth appointed to all will be the same – that of a male human – so that none may be disadvantaged by God.[112] This ensures an equal start for every soul, as they all receive the same opportunity to make the best or worst of their life. Thus there is no reason why envy should arise among embodied beings, since none may feel that another has been favoured by God and destiny, and subsequently no blame for partiality may be laid upon God.[113]

Once embodied, the souls experience violent and disturbing surges of powerful sensations, such as desire blended with pleasure and pain, as well as fear and anger. The soul's virtue and salvation will result from its ability to master these sensations, while being mastered by them will lead to vice and enslavement (42a–b).[114] The good and just souls will be exempt from the obligation to undergo the cycle of reincarnation, while those who succumb to the power of the affections will be born again, first as women, and if they continue to follow their evil ways, later on they will slide down into beastly forms (42c). Plato thus combines his free-choice theodicy with the doctrine of transmigration, to

110 This is reminiscent of the *Phaedrus* myth of the chariots (246a–254e), although with significant differences: the souls in the *Phaedrus* are not contemplating the universe, but the ὑπερουράνιον τόπον, 247c3; while in the *Timaeus* all souls are bound to be incarnated, in the *Phaedrus* 'the law of destiny' allows souls who have obtained a vision of the eternal truths to postpone their fall into a body indefinitely (248c); etc.

111 Cornford 1997 [1937], 144 draws a significant parallel with the Myth of Er: the souls of the *Timaeus* 'are also taught the laws of their own destiny, as the souls in the Myth of Er, between their incarnations, hear the discourse of Lachesis, daughter of Necessity. The chief lesson, here as there, is that the soul is responsible for any evil it may suffer'.

112 ὅτι γένεσις πρώτη μὲν ἔσοιτο τεταγμένη μία πᾶσιν, ἵνα μήτις ἐλαττοῖτο ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, 41e3–4.

113 The problem of inequality and of the differences between inherent traits of embodied beings is even more pressing for Christian thinkers, because the seemingly arbitrary conditions acquired with one's birth do not determine only one's prosperity and happiness in life, but often also the likelihood of salvation: some people seem naturally prone to performing good acts and to be pious, others not so. Origen, for example, resorts to the 'heretical' doctrine of character-forming movements of the souls in their pre-incarnate state in his attempt to solve this problem (*De Principiis* III.6.5). St. Augustine's answer, which combines God's foreknowledge and the soul's predestination to salvation, is orthodox enough, but allows God to be accused of gratuitous favouritism (see Hick 2010, 66–67). Plato partially bypasses the problem already with his endorsement of the doctrine of transmigration, and solves the destructive objection of infinite regress with the picture of the Demiurge assuring the souls that they all share the same initial embodiment.

114 In the Myth of Er, the statement 'virtue has no master' (ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον, 617e3) emphasises that it is within each individual's power to resist temptations and choose the path of righteousness despite unfavourable circumstances.

provide the assurance that an undeserving soul will not be allowed to remain in a human body. This also ensures that the so-called prosperity of the wicked will be but temporary: today's tyrant may be a tapeworm tomorrow. This is in accordance with the account presented in the Myth of Er, but also with the theodicy of *Laws* X, developed in chapter 5 below.

This painful transmigration from body to body only ceases when the inner irrational turbulences have been soothed by the exercise of reason; the soul may then recover its original blessed state as a companion of its appointed star (42c–d). The Demiurge solemnly proclaimed these rules to all souls, so that they might understand that their success or failure would be their own responsibility, and 'in order that thereafter he would remain guiltless of the vices of each of them' – ἵνα τῆς ἔπειτα εἴη κακίας ἑκάστων ἀναίτιος (42d3–4).[115] The god then 'sows' the souls in the Earth and in the other planets[116] and delegates to the younger gods the task to create their bodies and the mortal soul-parts, and to combine those parts to the immortal rational seed, which enables all souls to follow the path of righteousness, provided they are willing to do so (41c6–d1). The younger gods also receive the duty to guide and supervise each mortal being in the noblest and best way as far as they are able (κατὰ δύναμιν, 42e2), 'so that it wouldn't become its own cause of evil' – ὅτι μὴ κακῶν αὐτὸ ἑαυτῷ γίγνοιτο αἴτιον (42e3–4). The addition of κατὰ δύναμιν suggests that despite the gods' best intentions and efforts, the individual soul has the freedom to disregard their guidance, and thus indeed to become the cause of its own evils.[117]

Thus, the crucial statements forming Timaeus' Solution from Personal Responsibility occur at 41e3–4, 42d3–4, and 42e3–4, all quoted above. Plato first portrays his Demiurge informing the souls that he does not discriminate: none will be privileged nor slighted, and they all will receive an equal chance to improve or debase themselves. This is materialised by the allocation of a male human body to all souls, without exception, upon their first incarnation. Then the Demiurge briefly mentions the future challenges and tribulations that await the souls in their incarnate state, so that they may be aware and ready to acknowledge that they themselves are the causes of their own failures.

115 For a learned elaboration on this point, see Petrucci 2022, 303–305.

116 For a brief statement of the controversy concerning Plato's endorsement of extraterrestrial animal life, and references to Taylor and Cornford, see Zeyl 2000, LII, and footnote 113.

117 Burnyeat 1999, 247 seems to express a similar idea: 'By supplying the rational soul with a body and nonrational desires, the lesser gods set the arena of challenge and choice within which the embodied rational soul is enjoined by the Demiurge to achieve justice, virtue and salvation'.

Finally, the younger gods are instructed to guide and help the living beings, to the best of their ability, but without becoming responsible for the blunders of their protégés, who have received the power and the freedom to make their own choices, good or bad: the younger gods are not to interfere with the souls' freedom of choice. In order for the souls' decision to reject vice and embrace a life of virtue to be genuine, it must be their own and in no way influenced by a superior power.

Despite the different narrative setting, the purport of these statements is the same as that of the αἰτία ἑλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος dictum of the Myth of Er,[118] and they raise the same problems.[119] Since these issues were already discussed in some detail in chapter 2, we shall not say much here. The key message is clear: all embodied souls should heed the divine instructions and remember that, although they are primarily rational creatures, they will experience violent reactions due to the forces of corporeality imposed by necessity. A soul may resist these powers, but if it succumbs to the forceful flow of sensations, pleasures, and pains, and renounces its most prized possession, the blame will be its own. God provides the appropriate knowledge, as well as other assets – such as the orderly revolution of the heavens manifesting the providential guidance of the deities – and, in doing so, he has acquitted himself of any guilt for the misbehaviour of the mortals: the responsibility for their subsequent degradation or betterment is theirs alone. Plato reiterates here the theodicean strategy of the *Republic*: after reaffirming the omnibenevolent nature of his deity, he delegates the responsibility for the badness experienced by living beings to the individual moral agents. He thus sets firm foundations for what will become known as the Free-Will Defence of God's goodness.

4.3.3 *A Factor Beyond God's Control: Timaean Necessity*

The above strategy – to place the blame for badness on human folly – may be an adequate response to the problem of moral evil, but it leaves unsolved many areas of the physical aspect of the overall problem: it fails to explain evils such

118 As far as 42d3–4 is concerned, both Archer-Hind 1888, 144–146 and Taylor 1928, 264 refer the reader back to the *Republic* II and the Myth of Er. As expected, Archer-Hind's interpretation of the presence of evil among souls has strong Hegelian overtones, while Taylor – also not surprisingly – ascribes the idea that God is in no sense responsible for human shortcomings and failures to the Pythagoreans. In his note to 42e3–4, Archer-Hind 1888, 146 aptly remarks that while we are not answerable for the badness that stems from the limitations of materiality, 'for all that is the result of our own folly we are answerable'. Similarly, Taylor 1928, 266 writes: 'The 'created gods', like the supreme God, are not responsible for the mischief a man causes by his own wilful folly'.

119 See 2.4 above.

as natural catastrophes, still-born infants, congenital diseases, diseases that do not result from overindulgence, etc.[120] Although the mythical frame of Er's tale could perhaps accommodate both moral depravity and most instances of physical evil, by ascribing them to misguided choices made in the pre-natal state, Timaeus' εἰκός λόγος[121] is presented as a scientific account of the nature of the universe and of its occupants, and, as such, must provide a more probable account. Plato's Timaeus accomplishes this task by the introduction of the complex notion of errant cause, or Necessity,[122] which is a certain given, an entity uncreated and co-existent with God. This proves to be a very serviceable manoeuvre: besides partially accounting, through Necessity' fickle and non-intelligent nature, for physical evils,[123] it also suitably complements the

120 Plantinga 1974b, esp. 191–193 disagrees: he claims that *all* evil results from moral depravity, and argues that *it is possible* for the so-called natural evils to be caused by free non-human (im)moral agents, i.e., fallen angels.

121 For a very appealing interpretation of the εἰκός μῦθος/λόγος phrase of the *Timaeus*, see Burnyeat 2005 and Betegh 2010.

122 Due to the extensiveness and gravity of the matter it is not possible here to properly discuss the nature and status of Timaeus' Necessity (ἀνάγκη). Nevertheless, a few remarks are unavoidable, and for the time being the following must suffice. Necessity is a limiting factor, the basis of all deficiency and depravity, principle of imperfection that makes our world what it is, i.e., something less than the world of Being. The innate imperfection of the material out of which the cosmos is built makes its residents experience various calamities and insufficiencies. In its completed phase, it is composed and nondifferent from the four elements that constitute it. This Necessity is inseparable from its basis, the Receptacle, or the χώρα, upon which the building blocks of Necessity subsist and without which they could not exist – because everything that is, must be in something. Nevertheless, ἀνάγκη is manifestly different from χώρα. Necessity as materiality, or more precisely, corporeality (τὸ σωματοειδές), arises in an obscure way due to the contact of two non-empirical factors. The first are the images of the Forms of the elements, the second is the χώρα, their substratum and an entity which is neither bodily nor incorporeal. In the *Timaeus* the χώρα-ἀνάγκη complex facilitates the existence of the corporeal world, while ἀνάγκη answers for the insufficiencies, imperfections and disturbances that beset the universe, as well as for the violent agitations that invade the soul. For a discussion of the nature and the ontological status of Necessity and the Receptacle, see Ilievski 2023.

123 Broadie 2001, 6 claims that Plato did not consider natural evils as real evil, and believed that 'the only truly bad things are moral evil and such non-moral conditions as promote it'. Chilcott 1923, and Wood 2009 advocate the same thesis, and Cornford 1997 [1937], 144 quotes Proclus to the same effect. Plato's calm acceptance of natural catastrophes in the introductory section of the *Timaeus*, his refusal to acknowledge death as evil in the *Apology* and the *Crito*, his explanation of distress and misery as the effects of wrong choices, i.e., as just retribution for past mistakes, all support this interpretation. However, Plato should not be fully aligned with the Stoics on this matter, and there is much evidence that he does not overlook natural evil altogether. In *Prt.* 323d, bodily deficiencies are clearly described as evils (opposites of goods, to be more precise). The *Republic*'s statements

Solution from Personal Responsibility, which concentrates mostly on moral evils.[124] And of course, Necessity plays a crucial role in the overall constitution of the world, 'for the mixed coming into being of this universe was brought forth by the combination of Necessity and Intellect' (47e5–48a2). It can thus be interpreted as the principle behind the overarching imperfection, transitory nature and instability of the world.[125]

As a result, at least part of the responsibility for the evils experienced in the world may be attributed to Necessity. This thesis is founded upon the widely accepted assumption that *ἀνάγκη*'s nature is recalcitrant, that it offers resistance to the good intentions of the Creator. Yet some scholars maintain that this does not reflect Plato's view. Among the most recent critics that belong to this camp are David Sedley 2007, 113–127, Sarah Broadie 2012, 183, Federico

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'good things are fewer than bad things in our life' and 'God is the cause of good things only' (379a–380c), hardly exclude non-moral evil and suffering. The same applies to *Leg.* 906a2–5, which transposes the predominance of badness from human to global level: εἶναι μὲν τὸν οὐρανὸν πολλῶν μεστὸν ἀγαθῶν, εἶναι δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐναντίων, πλειόνων δὲ τῶν μή – 'the universe is full of many good things on the one hand, many bad ones on the other, and the latter are more numerous'. In addition, the language used by Plato in his discussion, in *Tim.* 82a–87e, of the diseases of body and soul and of their causes clearly indicates that he considers the diseases as unwanted conditions and instances of badness, affecting not only the body, but also the soul: e.g., 82b5 – πλημμελήσῃ, disease trespasses over proportion and order, cf. 30a4–5, κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως; 83a3–5 – substances causing diseases become hateful to themselves and hostile to the body; 83e4–5 – they act against the laws of nature (παρὰ τοὺς τῆς φύσεως λαμβάνῃ νόμους); 84e1 – diseases are painful; 84e10 – even their cures are dangerous; 85a5–7 – a disease may even throw the head's circuits into confusion; 85e4 – it causes disorder; 86b2 – some serious diseases of the soul arise from bodily conditions; 86e3–5 – pains arising from the body are badness (κακία) for the soul; 87c4 – diseases of body and soul are bad things, evils (κάκα); 87e4–5 – an ugly, disproportionate body is a cause of countless evils for itself (μυρίων κακῶν αἴτιον ἑαυτῷ). Furthermore, in *Laws* 906c, Plato acknowledges both physical suffering and moral depravity as undesirable phenomena, although he conflates them when he states that disease in a body, plague in a season, and injustice in a city are but different names for the same thing, namely lack of measure or proportion. Carone 2005, 25 seems to accept that Plato was concerned with the problem of natural evil, and hints that it may be a result of the workings of Necessity.

124 See *Tim.* 42a–b, where it is said that passions and emotions necessarily (ἀναγκαῖον) attack the embodied soul. Zeyl explains that this is so because '[i]t is not possible to create individual living things without an external environment, hence without sense perception, pleasure and pain, and their concomitant violent emotions [...] given such a world, it is not possible to create living things not susceptible to moral degeneration', Zeyl 2000, LXXIX.

125 Cf. Ferrari 2022, LI, who describes the unintelligent cause as 'la causa di tutto ciò che nell′ universo non è teleológicamente orientado'. A related view on evil as imperfection generated by the corporeal constituent of the universe is given in Scudieri 2019.

Petrucci 2022, 321–322. Especially Sedley argues at length and rather persuasively that the traditional understanding of recalcitrant ἀνάγκη is groundless. We hold that the following considerations, herein only briefly stated, invalidate his claim.

First, at 46e3–6, Plato invites his reader to distinguish between two types of causes in the universe: one producing good and beautiful things (καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν), the other, randomness and disorder (τὸ τυχὸν ἄτακτον), i.e., badness. As is well known, the first type refers to the intelligent causes (probably in the plural to reflect the inclusion of the lesser gods in the process of creation), while the second is ἀνάγκη or πλανωμένη αἰτία. Contrary to Sedley's claim, there is no indication that this ἀνάγκη should be interpreted as the nature of matter *before* it was touched by intelligent design, '[a]s manifested paradigmatically by the pre-cosmic chaos'.[126] In fact, Necessity proper arises as a cause only *after* the ordering of the primordial chaos,[127] and is prone to produce random and disordered effects whenever, *per impossibile*, is left to act without Intellect's superintendence.[128]

Second, 48a2–5 contains two almost unambiguous statements highlighting Necessity's unruly and recalcitrant nature: 'νοῦς established his reign over ἀνάγκη by persuading her to lead *most* of the created things towards what is

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126 Sedley 2007, 116.

127 On this point we are in agreement with Johansen 2004, 97–98, although we disagree with his interpretation of the notion of Timaean Necessity, which he understands as strict causal necessity, does not recognise any irregularity in its operation, and thus explains it away as a possible cause of badness. It should also be noted that the claim that it arises after the act of ordering does not mean that Necessity's disorderliness and recalcitrance are not rooted in the original chaos, and that the latter is not intrinsically subversive to and disruptive of the Demiurge's good intentions; it is only to say that ἀνάγκη as a *causal factor* is born only after the Demiurge's intervention on the elements' structure. This is so because in and by itself, the primordial chaos is causally inefficient, and thus cannot exert any *direct* influence on the creation.

128 However, exactly such situation is depicted in the myth of *Politicus* 268d–276e, through the image of the universe's reverse rotation, which takes place when the chief deity and the subordinate gods abandon their positions as directors of the cosmic affairs (*Plt.* 272e–273e). Plato's point, both in the *Timaeus* and in the *Politicus*, is that some vestiges of the initial chaos 'survive' the ordering and are retained in the universes' building-blocks. Otherwise, the forces of corporeality would not be prone to plunge the cosmos into the 'limitless sea of unlikeness' (*Plt.* 273d6–e1) as soon as God releases the reins. This is the same phenomenon, it seems, that Reydams-Schils 2003, 12 depicts as '[t]he continued effect of what we may call the flux-factor in the ordered universe', and lists it as her fourth and last argument in favour of the traditional interpretation. An important upshot of this reading of the *Timaeus* and the *Politicus* is the identification of the former's ἀνάγκη and the latter's τὸ σωματοειδές.

best' – νοῦ δὲ ἀνάγκης ἄρχοντος τῷ πείθειναὐτὴν τῶν γιγνομένων τὰ πλεῖστα ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιστον ἄγει (48a2–3), and 'this All was put together in the beginning through the *defeat of Necessity by intelligent persuasion*' – δι› ἀνάγκης ἡττωμένης ὑπὸ πειθοῦς ἔμφρονος (48a4–5). The language of this passage that involves terms like persuasion, ruling over, defeat, speaks loudly enough of the position of ἀνάγκη in relation to νοῦς, while the statement that even in the ordered world there are some portions of it which are inclined towards what is not good, is supportive of the thesis that ἀνάγκη remains imperfectly subdued. Sedley recognises this challenge to his interpretation but masterfully circumvents it by explaining that the unruly nature of the elements, manifested in forest fires, floods, etc., has its proper place in the divine plan.[129] His rationale is that Plato never took the periodic cataclysms of major floods or conflagrations that wipe out entire civilisations as something bad. On the contrary, they are a necessary, even beneficial part of a civilisation's life cycle.[130] In answer to Sedley, one may say that his interpretation implies that elemental catastrophes are the only manifestation of the unruliness of corporeality, and fails to take into consideration the unpredictable singular occurrences of floods, which cannot be equated with the former. Even if neither Plato nor Aristotle considered periodical extinctions as bad, there is no indication that they extended this analysis to particular disasters on a smaller scale. These are but random occurrences that do not mark the beginning of a new era nor bring any apparent benefit, but only cause pain and misery to humans and animals alike.

Third, Reydams-Schils supplies 56c5–6 (ὅπῃπερ ἡ τῆς ἀνάγκης ἑκοῦσα πεισθεῖσά τε φύσις ὑπεῖκεν) as her second 'proof' that 'the ordered universe bears the marks of unresolved tensions'.[131] Sedley translates this clause as 'in whatever way the nature of necessity yielded under willing persuasion', and warns that most translators render ὅπῃπερ as 'to the extent that', which 'conveys the impression, unwarranted by the Greek, that the yielding was incomplete'.[132] The semantics of ὅπῃπερ aside, and even with Sedley's 'in whatever way' preserved, the clause may still be interpreted as suggesting that Necessity has not yielded completely.[133] Indeed, such rendering is warranted by the text of the *Timaeus* – for example at 48a3 (the above τὰ πλεῖστα ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιστον ἄγειν), or at 53b5–6 (τὸ δὲ ᾗ δυνατὸν ὡς κάλλιστα ἄριστά τε ἐξ οὐχ οὕτως ἐχόντων τὸν θεὸν

129 Sedley 2007, 118–120.

130 Sedley 2007, 120.

131 Reydams-Schils 2003, 12.

132 Sedley 2007, 119, footnote 57.

133 E.g., in Cornford's translation 1997 [1937], 223 the adverb remains rather inconspicuous, which does not modify his traditional rendering of the clause. His emphasis is on the finite verb ὑπεῖκεν, translated as 'permitted'.

αὐτὰ συνιστάναι),[134] etc. Furthermore, Plato's statement that Necessity *yielded* (ὑπεῖκεν) *upon* or *after being persuaded* (πεισθεῖσά), albeit willingly (ἑκοῦσα), is also reminiscent of the language of coercion used at 48a2–5. Thus, 56c5–6 prefigures a recurrent idea in the later parts of the dialogue: ἀνάγκη had to be persuaded to cooperate, and the task was not completed fully, but instead for the most part. The list of Sedley's objections and answers to them may go on, however for the present purposes these three most significant cases should suffice. In the *Timaeus* there is ample indication of ἀνάγκη's recalcitrance.

Of course, in most cases, Intellect successfully prevails over Necessity. The third part of Timaeus' discourse[135] deals with the cooperation between νοῦς and 'persuaded' ἀνάγκη, which aims to produce the best possible result (69a–92c). Close to the beginning of the section (69d–72d), Plato offers an engaging teleological explanation for the organisation of the internal organs inside the human body, which suggests that these organs are organised as they are because they each correspond to a mortal part of the soul, and these must be arranged so as to facilitate as much as possible their proper operation and neutralise their harmful tendencies. The soul's spirited and appetitive parts are not truly desirable, but a human being can not function without them; therefore they are located in places where they may achieve maximum functionality with the highest end in view. Thus, the spirited part is situated in the heart, so as to be close to the head, the seat of reason. There, it is able easily to hear the commands of reason, and to convey them to the whole body through the circulatory system. Moreover, the heart is surrounded by the lungs, which, being soft and perforated, cool and refresh the heart when it has been agitated by the anger caused by passions (69e–70d). The appetitive part, a beast untamed, but also necessary for the existence of mortal beings, is located between the diaphragm and the navel, as far away from the seat of reason as possible, to decrease the risk that it might disturb its intellectual activity. The gods establish the functions of the mortal soul and the bodily organs as they create them, all ultimately subservient to the highest goal of life: to return to one's original position. Necessity participates by providing the material ingredients, unavoidably supplied with some unwanted characteristics. The cooperation of νοῦς and ἀνάγκη is revealed through the former's successful utilisation of the given material for the intended purpose.[136] Sometimes, however, Necessity

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134 'That the God constructed those things as fair and good as that was possible, from the state when they were not so'.

135 According to Cornford 1997 [1937], 279.

136 For a clear overview of the creation of the mortal soul and the bodily mechanisms, see Zeyl 2000, LXXVIII–IXXXIV.

refuses to comply; in these cases, Intellect must compromise, and sacrifice lesser intentions to higher goals – whence arise the occurrences of some types of physical evil.

Timaeus' description of the uneven distribution of the flesh over bones containing unequal quantities of marrow provides an example of the unwanted consequences of the concessions νοῦς has made to ἀνάγκη. Marrow is a key substance for the living entity, because all three parts of the soul are 'anchored' to it: the immortal part to the brain, the other two parts to the rest of the marrow, extending through the spine and the bones (73c–d). Logic would suggest that the bones which contain the most marrow should be covered with thicker flesh to protect their contents, and yet the craftsmen of the body opted for the opposite arrangement.

> Now those bones in which there is most marrow he fenced about with the smallest amount of flesh; those having least life within them, with flesh in greatest abundance [...] so that the solidity of many layers of thick flesh packed close to one another should not cause dullness of sensation and produce hardness of apprehension and unretentiveness in the quarters of the mind. (74e1–10, tr. Cornford 1997 [1937], 298)

Instead of protecting the brain with dense bone and thick flesh, the lesser gods encased it within the brittle shell of the skull, covered by the thinnest layer of flesh. According to Plato, this is in keeping with Intellect's requirement that the brain should be as sensitive and responsive as possible, while the necessary means for accomplishing this goal is thin bone and flesh (74e). Thus, on the one hand stands the exigency for the brain to be well protected, on the other Intellect's stipulation that it should be receptive and sharp. Unfortunately, these two things simply do not go together:

> For the constitution of this frame which of necessity comes into being and is reared with us in no wise allows dense bone and much flesh to go together with keenly responsive sensation. For if these two characters had consented to coincide, the structure of the head would have possessed them above all, and the human race, bearing a head fortified with flesh and sinew, would have enjoyed a life twice or many times as long as now, healthier and more free from pain. But as it was, the artificers who brought us into being reckoned whether they should make a long-lived but inferior race or one with life shorter but nobler, and agreed that everyone must on all accounts prefer the shorter and better life to the longer and worse. (75a7–c3, tr. Cornford 1997 [1937], 298)

Since Necessity could not be fully persuaded by Intellect, longevity and freedom from pain had to be sacrificed to a higher good – acuteness of mind.[137] We thus end up with an unwanted condition, brought about by Necessity;[138] therefore, Necessity should bear the blame for such deficiencies, rather than the Demiurge or the other deities. Were not ἀνάγκη an unavoidable causal factor, the benevolent gods would have blessed us with a longer, less painful life.

These considerations lead to a very important conclusion: Plato's God, although omniscient and omnibenevolent, is not omnipotent. His best intentions are thwarted by a factor coexistent with him, which he cannot eliminate, but must accommodate in his all-good purposes, as far as possible. This is the essence of the Recalcitrant Entity Solution to the problem of evil: God is perfectly good and perfectly aware of the sufferings and moral failings experienced by living beings; but he does not generate the world *ex nihilo*. Beside him exists another factor – the power of corporeality – inferior and in no way his rival, but inherently flawed to the extent that it inevitably transfers its imperfection onto the world. Since God, despite his best intentions, may not create independently from this factor, nor change its nature, nor abolish it, the responsibility for universal badness may be consigned to it.

Plato did not state explicitly that he intended passage 74e–75c as a theodicean strategy, i.e., as one of the solutions to the problem of evil. But it was nonetheless noticed and adopted by the Stoics in their theodicy. In a nutshell, this particular Stoic response to the problem of evil states that some of the so-called evils are unavoidable consequences of the purposeful acts of Nature, aimed at a higher good. It is clearly discernible in Chrysippus' answer

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137 See Archer-Hind 1888, 278; Cornford 1997 [1937], 297–298; Gregory 2008, XLVIII–XLIX; Taylor 1928, 533; Zeyl 2000, LXXXI.

138 Sedley, as already noted, rejects the idea that this unfavourable compromise should be attributed 'to the intransigence of matter' (2007, 121). He goes on to claim: 'Similarly in the case of the head, the combination of durability and sensitivity is said to be impossible to achieve, not in matter as such, but in living tissue, which has to be subject to generation and growth'. It is hard to see how can 'living tissue' be separated from matter; the tissue of the organs, bones, etc., supervenes on Necessity and has no other factor as its 'material cause'. Besides, the counterfactual at 75b4–7 ('For if these two characters have consented to coincide …') shows that a combination of thick bone and sensitive brain is in theory possible, but in actuality the artificers were not in position to achieve it. Since this failure cannot be blamed on their confusion or on φθόνος, it has to be due to the other causal factor, i.e., Necessity. A further, though indirect, confirmation of the point that a perfect merger *is* possible is given at 75d5–e5, with the contrasting example of the construction of the mouth. In this case the ordering was made for the sake of both Intellect and Necessity (i.e., for the sake of both what is necessary and what is best: ἕνεκα τῶν ἀναγκαίων καὶ τῶν ἀρίστων, 75d6–7), while in the former case an inauspicious concession had to be made.

to the question 'do diseases affecting humans also arise in accordance with nature?', reported by Gellius.[139] Chrysippus proposes that the prime intention of Nature, or God, or Providence, is not to create man as a pitiful creature prone to various illnesses and injuries; such an act would not be becoming of an omnibenevolent creator. Still, while God was producing his magnificent works, perfecting their functions, and increasing their utility, undesirable qualities appeared in the final product. These also happen in accordance with Nature, but should be considered as some kind of necessary concomitances (κατὰ παρακολούθησιν), or accidental consequences. Chrysippus points out the example of the human skull's fragility, which renders the brain vulnerable to injuries. Nevertheless, the skull, as it is, is necessary for a being meant to live a life of reason; therefore, the good which results from its vulnerability much outweighs the bad – the increased possibility of pain and of an untimely death. This example is obviously drawn from the *Timaeus*, and, as Plutarch reports, Chrysippus also explicitly refers to Plato's principle when he writes that the badness is present in the world because 'there is also a considerable involvement of Necessity' – πολὺ καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης μεμῖχθαι.[140] Thus, according to this Platonic theodicean strategy, later adopted by the Stoics and adjusted to their monistic metaphysics, the things we experience as bad cannot but exist in the constitution of the world, in which the benefits and the goods, by their value and usefulness, by far outweigh the obstacles and inconveniences created by the so-called evils. A few centuries later, Plotinus develops the same idea in a strict Platonic fashion, when he claims that, although νοῦς rules over ἀνάγκη, the latter is the factor which drags the universe towards what is worse.[141]

4.4 Personal Responsibility Abandoned?

Timaeus 81e–87b deals with the diseases of body and soul and contains another passage relevant for our discussion of theodicy in the dialogue. This passage is intriguing, and perhaps rather puzzling; it does not challenge God's lack of responsibility for evil, but it may seem to contradict earlier statements

139 See SVF II.1170.

140 See SVF II.1178.

141 τῆς μὲν πρὸς τὸ χεῖρον ἑλκούσης, *Enn.* III.2.2.34. At III.2.2.32–42 Plotinus gives a brief account of the negative, but unavoidable role of ἀνάγκη; the same principle, this time designated as 'that which has order from outside' (III.2.4.34), is held responsible for the evils in III.2.4. For a brief discussion of this solution, see Ilievski 2018, 26–27 and 32.

according to which the individual moral agents were fully answerable for their wrong choices and misdeeds.[142]

Plato identifies three types of bodily diseases: (a) diseases caused by an excess, deficiency, or unbalance of the four elements in the body (81e–82b);[143] (b) diseases caused by the corruption and untimely decay of the secondary tissues – flesh, sinew, bone, marrow (82b–84c); (c) diseases caused when air, bile and phlegm are blocked in the body (84c–86a). He discusses next the diseases of the soul (86b–87b), more precisely 'those diseases of the soul resulting from a bodily condition' – τὰ δὲ περὶ ψυχὴν διὰ σώματος ἕξιν τῇδε, 86b2.[144] They are all related to mindlessness or folly (ἄνοια),[145] and fall into two categories: madness (μανία)[146] and ignorance (ἀμαθία).[147] The most dangerous diseases of the soul arise from excessive indulgence in pleasures (primarily sexual) and from intense pain. The passionate longing for sensual pleasure may have purely physical causes: in some men, the marrow produces an excess of seed, which flows out through the abnormally porous bones and moistens the body (86d3–5). As for pains, they are caused by poisonous phlegm and bile locked inside the body; they affect the motions of the soul and produce melancholy, cowardice, dullness, etc. (86e5–87a7). Therefore, it is incorrect to consider that a man maddened by pleasure or pain is being deliberately bad; such a person is, as a matter of fact, only ill (86d1–2). Plato explains:

> And in fact, nearly all such things, considered as succumbing to pleasures, and condemnable, as if the bad things were wilfully done (ὡς ἑκόντων

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142 According to the αἰτία ἑλομένου, *Resp.* 617e5 (see 2.2 above) and ὅτι μὴ κακῶν αὐτὸ ἑαυτῷ γίγνοιτο αἴτιον, *Tim.* 42e3–4 (see 4.3.2).

143 About the aberrant behaviour of the elements, causing diseases, Zeyl 2000, LXXXIV writes: 'Timaeus does not speculate about the causes of these 'unnatural' (82a7) phenomena. These are no doubt the effects of the residual random motions of the Receptacle, and as such are the products of Necessity over which Intellect has no power to prevail'.

144 This is Zeyl's translation. It is closer to the original than Archer-Hind's: 'those of the soul depend upon bodily habit in the following way', or Cornford's: 'disorders of the soul are caused by the bodily condition in the following way'. Zeyl's rendering limits the number of the diseases described in this short section, leaving open the possibility that some of the diseases of the soul are *not* caused by bodily states, which seems closer to Plato's intention. Archer-Hind leaves little room for this possibility, and the same, albeit to a lesser degree, applies to Cornford even though he needs such interpretation to corroborate the conclusions of his commentary on the section.

145 "Folly' means any state in which the divine reason (νοῦς) is not exercising due control over the rest of the soul', Cornford 1997 [1937], 346.

146 'Which means frantic passionate excitement, not pathological insanity', Cornford 1997 [1937], 346. Indeed, 'passion' is one of the secondary lexical meanings of μανία.

147 Cf. *Soph.* 227d228–e, for a different, yet related classification of the badness in the soul.

> λέγεται τῶν κακῶν), are not justly condemned; for no one is wilfully evil (κακὸς μὲν γὰρ ἑκὼν οὐδείς), but due to some bad condition of the body and uneducated upbringing, the wicked person become evil (διὰ δὲ πονηρὰν ἕξιν τινὰ τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἀπαίδευτον τροφὴν ὁ κακὸς γίγνεται κακός). These are hateful things, and they may happen to anyone against their will. (86d5–e3)

Many scholars read this passage as a plain rejection of the notion of individual moral responsibility, established earlier, in the Myth of Er, and in the *Timaeus* itself. Even the alleged culprits are here clearly identified, and, only a little later in the text once again emphatically emphasised:

> Thus, all of us who are evil become evil on account of two quite involuntary causes (ταύτῃ κακοὶ πάντες οἱ κακοὶ διὰ δύο ἀκουσιώτατα γιγνόμεθα); for these, one must always blame the parents more than the children, and the tutors more than the pupils. (87b3–6)

This and the related statements found in the relevant section of the *Timaeus* give the impression that Plato contradicts his previous claims by suggesting that no individual is to blame for his or her moral failure. Instead, the responsibility falls on the parents who were neglectful at the moment of conception and gave their children a defective body, and on the teachers who failed to improve the flawed state of their pupils by providing adequate education.[148]

Nonetheless, this interpretation of the above passages is not unanimous. Archer-Hind, commenting on 86d7–e1 (κακὸς μὲν γὰρ ἑκὼν οὐδείς – 'no one is wilfully evil') and on the subsequent lines, writes: 'This passage is one of the most important ethical statements in Plato's writings', and adds that the αἰτία ἑλομένου declaration of the *Republic* is implied by the κακὸς ἑκὼν οὐδείς, and vice versa: 'each statement in fact involves the other and could not be true without it'.[149] He agrees with 87b3–6, quoted above, and supports it with a further quotation from *Republic* 492a, which underlines the problem of sophists corrupting the youth.[150] He nevertheless acknowledges the regress problem associated with this issue (as does Taylor): if one claims that one's parents and teachers

148 Conceivably, the parents may be guilty of their offspring's μανία; the teachers, of their pupils' ἀμαθία.

149 See Archer-Hind 1888, 324–326. He reaches this conclusion by raising the discussion up to an ontological level.

150 Archer-Hind 1888, 327.

are guilty for one's moral badness, they could equally respond that the responsibly is not theirs, but their predecessors', etc.

On the other hand, Taylor spares no effort to demonstrate that Timaeus' interpretation of the Socratic formula οὐδείς ἑκὼν ἁμαρτάνει ('no one sins wilfully') evidently denies individual moral responsibility, a notion emphasised by Plato elsewhere in this works, as well as by his spokesman Timaeus in the eponymous dialogue, when he discusses ethics and theology: '[Timaeus'] exposition explains away that very fact of moral responsibility on which Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Timaeus himself, when he is talking ethics and not medicine, are all anxious to insist'.[151] The doctrine presented in the section on the diseases of the soul requires to attribute to Plato a type of determinism that denies moral freedom and responsibility, and thus stands in stark contrast with what he already wrote and will write on the subject. Therefore, Taylor, wishing to save Plato (and Socrates) from self-contradiction, attributes these ideas to Timaeus himself and to medical men of the fifth century BCE. Despite the typical attribution of the Timaean ideas to non-Platonic sources, Taylor's argument is comprehensive and suitably persuasive: Plato could not have subscribed to what he wrote in this section of his book. Therefore Cornford, who disagrees with Taylor on this point (and on many others, for that matter), has no option but to take the only possible route: he restricts the range of the diseases of the soul Timaeus talks about. In brief, Cornford proposes that the follies described by Timaeus – μανία and ἀμαθία, do not '[c]over the whole field of what could be called 'disorder of the soul'. They are the conditions which can arise from 'a bad habit of body' and be encouraged by 'unenlightened upbringing' in youth'.[152] This is not an uncontroversial statement, because Timaeus indeed expresses himself in general terms when he says that 'due to some bad condition of the body and uneducated upbringing does the wicked person become evil' (86e1–2), and 'thus all of us who are evil become evil on account of two quite involuntary causes' (87b3–4). Nevertheless, the section is introduced by Timaeus' announcement that he will discuss diseases of the soul that arise from *certain bodily states* (86b2); it naturally follows that some disorders of the soul will be left out of the discussion. Furthermore, he claims that all men who are *incontinent in pursuing pleasures* are wrongly condemned as if they were willingly bad (86d6–7). In other words, Plato does not seem to suggest that no wicked person should be blamed for his or her mental states and behaviour, but that sex-addicts for example, all other considerations aside,

151 Taylor 1928, 611.
152 Cornford 1997 [1937], 346.

should not be condemned for their vice as if they had brought it on themselves intentionally, since it is possible that they were driven to it by their bodily constitution. This does not mean that there do not exist other forms of moral badness that call for reproach and punishment – for example, excessive love of moneymaking, unprovoked violent demeanour, or sadistic impulses. Even licentiousness itself becomes a form of moral transgression when one indulges in it against, and despite, the good advice and admonition of well-wishers; the wrongdoer must then bear the consequences of his choice. This may be one of the reasons why Plato warns against badly governed cities and negligent educators who are unable to lead to the right path those under their care (87a7–87b6). The possibility of improvement and the *duty* to attempt it are always available; this allows Plato to urge us, immediately after stating that we become bad on account of causes beyond our power, 'to be eager to flee from wickedness and to appropriate its opposite, in whichever way possible, both through one's upbringing and through pursuit of education' (87b6–8).

Thus, the section on the maladies of the soul once again draws the reader's attention to the influence of Necessity against the good advice of Intellect; it does not contradict the αἰτία ἑλομένου and similar formulas. For this interpretation to be valid, the section must be read as referring to a limited domain of moral failures, i.e., those that arise from corrupt bodily conditions. This approach is not only probable, but also preferable to its opposite, because it is more economical, and also protects Plato from the charge of blatant contradiction within the frame of a single dialogue.

4.5 Closing Remarks

This chapter was dedicated to the investigation of Plato's theodicy in the *Timaeus*. Its first and second section dwelled on the mistaken concept of divine φθόνος and its refutation. The first section suggested that, for Plato at least, the emotion denoted by the term 'φθόνος' is not jealousy, but rather a complex feeling of envy for other people's possessions and of an urge to begrudge sharing one's own possessions. This emotion is clearly unknown to the Timaean craftsman-god, since he desires to produce a creation as similar to himself as possible, and is eager to impart the gifts of rationality and immortality to all sentient inhabitants of the cosmos. In the second section, the question 'Why a world at all?' received the answer that the creation's existence was rendered necessary by the Demiurge's omnibenevolence, which prompts him to mend the primordial chaos and to generate a good and beautiful creation out of

something inherently bad and ugly. Thus, Plato's cosmos in the *Timaeus* is a result of divine providence.

Section 3 identified three theodicean strategies in the *Timaeus*. The first one, the so-called Principle of Plenitude, is implicit in the text and indirectly justifies God's ways by explaining that the diversity of creation is meaningful, despite the presence of inequality and of apparently unseemly or undesirable life-forms. It was observed that Plato bases his answer on the propositions that this cosmos is a copy of an eternal model; that the model is a Living Creature encompassing all intelligible living creatures; that the Demiurge is good. A good craftsman wants a copy to be as similar to the model as possible: as such, the Demiurge included in his creation every living creature present in the Paradigm. The second theodicean strategy – the previously discussed Solution from Personal Responsibility – places the blame for individual failures and sufferings on the moral agents themselves. The Demiurge does his best to provide the soon-to-be-embodied souls with suitable recommendations and appropriate knowledge of what lies ahead of them: if they fail to act accordingly, the guilt is theirs alone. This solution answers the moral aspect of the problem of evil, since it transfers the responsibility for all moral transgressions and misbehaviour towards oneself and towards the others onto the agent. Finally, it becomes clear that Plato's Demiurge, although all-good and all-knowing, is not all-powerful. His goodness might therefore be defended by yet another strategy – the Recalcitrant Entity Solution – which is not applicable to the later Christian theodicies. Plato, in the *Timaeus*, introduces the element of recalcitrant Necessity, which, despite the Demiurge's best wishes and endeavours, contributes to the instability and imperfection of the cosmos. This inherent instability and fallibility of the world's material accounts primarily for evils that do not depend on human actions, i.e., for the natural evils, such as earthquakes and wildfires. Timaean Necessity also provides an explanation for the overall corruptible and corrupted nature of the creation, and thus represents, ultimately, the metaphysical foundation of all evil.

The foregoing division cannot but remind the reader of Leibniz's taxonomy of evil; it is therefore appropriate to ask whether its application to the study of ancient conceptions of evil and theodicy may not be too anachronistic. On the one hand, it clearly is, because Plato never made such a distinction. On the other hand, we believe that all these different aspects of evil are discernible in the relevant passages of Plato's works, and that the preservation of the traditional taxonomy is prudent because it facilitates precision and clarity of exposition. A cautious approach is still required; Plato is a multifaceted thinker, and his views must not be examined from a single perspective only. As far as the matter of evil is concerned, it is undeniable that Plato ponders the badness of

vice and moral failures.[153] However, when it comes to the physical aspect of the problem, Plato's outlook reflects the complexity of his philosophy in general. Thus, Plato the soteriologist, the teacher who urges those who desire to experience the truth to 'turn away from the world of becoming with the entire soul, until the soul becomes able to endure the contemplation of the Being, and the brightest entity of the world of Being, the one that we call the Good',[154] probably does not consider anything concerning petty human affairs as either good or bad. Even death is not a source of distress for the condemned Socrates of the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*. The pre-eminent philosophers of the *Theaetetus* Digression and of the *Republic*'s Simile of the Cave are also well acquainted with the difference between substance and shadow. Therefore, none of these thinkers would recognise suffering as a true evil; only personal moral depravity is evil, because it prevents the soul from uniting with the divine. Nevertheless, Plato is not only a soteriologist; he is also a moral philosopher, a theologian, a teacher who addresses his fellow men; as such, he is fully aware of the 'evils of human life',[155] and of the need to defend God's goodness against being blamed for them. In this capacity, he acknowledges both moral failings and suffering inflicted by human and non-human causes as evils (κακά). He also recognises τὸ κακόν, the origin of τὰ κακά;[156] it is the equivalent of ἀνάγκη of the *Timaeus* and of τὸ σωματοειδές of the *Politicus* – two terms denoting the same entity.[157] We suggest that τὸ κακόν stands for the first item of Leibniz's taxonomy,[158] i.e., for metaphysical evil, although not as something evil in itself, but as origin of all imperfection.

The above considerations must suffice as a justification of the claim that the tripartite division of evil is, to some extent, applicable to Plato. Let us wind

153 For the thesis that moral evil is, in Plato's eyes, the only truly bad thing, see Chilcott 1923, Broadie 2001, and Wood 2009. However, indications that Plato does recognise physical or natural evil as something genuinely bad are not scant, as already pointed out. Besides, evil in the soul is not some kind of a free-floating property. We submit that it is generated by the power of ignorance, itself a result of the contact of soul with corporeality.

154 *Resp.* 518c8–d1.

155 τὰ ἀνθρώπειά κακὰ, *Resp.* 517d5.

156 Although this distinction is not explicit anywhere in the dialogues, we hope that the above discussion on the *Theaetetus* made its implicit presence at least acceptable.

157 For the identity of ἀνάγκη and τὸ σωματοειδές, see Ilievski, 2023. For a brief statement of the thesis that corporeality is Plato's origin of evil, see Ilievski 2013, 31–32. The same article argues that soul is not and cannot be a direct cause of evil. Hager, prompted by his explorations of the *Timaeus*, also concludes that the corporeal material (das körperlich Materielle) is Plato's principle of evil. However, he identifies this material not with ἀνάγκη, but with χώρα – mistakenly, in our view. See Hager 1987, 28–30.

158 See p. 2 above.

up this excursus with a word of clarification concerning the aspects of evil. Somewhat differently from Leibniz, we understand metaphysical evil in the Platonic context as the cause of the fact that the sensible world is lesser than the Intelligible, and therefore divided, corruptible, finite and permeated with numerous other imperfections. The world is such because of its bodily nature and the imperfect realisation of the Forms in the corporeal substrate. Under the heading of physical or natural evil may be subsumed every variety of suffering, bodily and mental, experienced by living beings as a result of their own actions and attitudes, of the interference of other living beings, and of natural causes. Moral evil refers to injustice and other vices that contaminate the soul. In principle, it may be experienced and committed only by human beings. Moral and physical evils are symptoms, or rather progressive stages of metaphysical evil: when the innate imperfection of the sensible realm is projected on the animate individual bodies, physical evil is born; when the same imperfection is, through the body, transferred to the individual soul, moral evil arises.

Thus section 3 argued in favour of the claim that Plato offers three important and influential theodicean strategies through his explicit and implicit ideas contained in the *Timaeus*. The first two especially have had momentous impact since their first introduction by Plato; many later thinkers adopted them and applied them to their theodicies. The Principle of Plenitude was adopted by Plotinus and St. Augustine. The Solution from Personal Responsibility became the Free-will theodicy and was further developed first by the Stoics, then by Plotinus and St. Augustine, and remains very influential to the present day. The Recalcitrant Entity Solution was first embraced by the Stoics and later by Plotinus – wholeheartedly; Proclus however vehemently argued against it, especially in his *De malorum subsistentia*. Indeed, Plato's theodicy in the *Timaeus* is much more serious and intricate than usually accepted.

Finally, the fourth section discussed a curious section of the *Timaeus* which seems to contradict the notion of individual moral responsibility developed in the Myth of Er and in the *Timaeus* itself. According to these controversial passages focused primarily on the diseases of the soul, the blame for the moral agents' badness does not rest on themselves, but on their parents and educators. This contradiction may be avoided by considering the crucial significance of Plato's exhortation to make every possible personal endeavour to flee from badness and improve one's character – this would not be possible, if badness, or the absence of it, was solely determined by our guardians. Limiting the scope of the diseases of the soul to the specific group of diseases that arise from certain bodily states also allows to circumvent the apparent contradiction. It implies that a different cluster of evils, or psychic maladies, which depend on the strength of the moral agent's desire to acquire virtue, or the opposite, may be identified.

CHAPTER 5

Theodicy in *Laws* X

Our investigations of Plato's theodicy originated in a short passage from *Republic* II, led us through the somewhat puzzling, but nonetheless compelling and instructive Myth of Er nested in the closing book of the *Republic*, made a brief but significant stop at the *Theaetetus* Digression, and reaped its most valuable harvest from the rich soil of the *Timaeus*. The final stage of these inquiries will be reached through the analysis of a noteworthy section of the *Laws*. This dialogue is Plato's longest, and last work, and it contains his final thoughts on political philosophy, jurisprudence, theory of education, and theology.[1] The theodicy of the *Laws* is presented in book X of the dialogue, and the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that Plato in *Laws* X undertakes a compelling, and philosophically relevant defence of divine goodness, segments of which will play an important role in the more elaborate theodicies of later thinkers. The relevant passages from *Laws* X display more clear-cut theodicean profile than any other section of Plato's dialogues; and yet, the theodicy of the *Laws* is not an independent segment, but is embedded in the discussion of natural theology – yet another contribution of Plato to the world of philosophy. Therefore, before focusing on the theodicean ideas of *Laws* X, their context – the theological discourse delivered by the character of the unnamed Athenian – will be delineated in section 5.1. Section 5.2 concentrates on the so-called Aesthetic Theme, Plato's pivotal and most original idea in the theodicy of *Laws* X, which states that everything, including vice and suffering, may be, and is, accommodated within the broader picture of the universe constructed and managed in accordance with the principles of rationality and teleology. Taken as a whole, the world is an epitome of beauty and a manifestation of divine benevolence; evils, apparent aberrations, have their proper place, and play a useful role, in the great cosmic drama. Section 5.3 reverts to the Solution from Personal Responsibility, present in the *Laws* theodicy as well, but also introduces the Justice in the Afterlife Solution, which is closely related to Plato's doctrine of metempsychosis. This solution asserts that both the gentle and the malicious remain under constant divine supervision and that they shall receive their due reward and penalty, if not in this, then in their next embodied existence.

1 For a detailed overview of the dialogue, see Taylor 1949, 465–497.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004679306_007

5.1 The Natural Theology of the *Laws*

In *Laws* x Plato sets the foundations for a new field of philosophical inquiry, known as natural theology.[2] The term comes from Marcus Terentius Varro and his division of theology into three types: mythical, natural, and civil – as discussed in 1.3 above. For Plato, natural theology fulfils two roles: first, to provide a correct understanding of the divine to the philosophically minded; second, to serve as a corrective of mythical theology, and to establish a firm basis for civil theology – which are both intended for the ordinary pious members of the society. In the relevant passages of the *Laws*, natural theology fulfils these roles by providing a theoretical support to three major ideas, expressed as legal decrees: (1) the gods exist as divine entities, prior and superior to anything physical; (2) the gods are good: they do not neglect human beings and may not be appeased by the gifts and prayers of the unjust; (3) private shrines and private religion must be abolished.[3]

This means that Plato's exposition of his philosophy of religion in *Laws* x has a very practical purpose: it is a preamble to the laws on impiety presented at the end of the book (907e–910d), which address the five types of hubristic offences perpetrated by misguided citizens,[4] especially young ones.[5] This preamble is written so as to persuade the population of the integrity of the laws, and thus protect legislators from the possibility of being accused to pass arbitrary laws and to rely on the fear of punishment to enforce these laws.[6] Book x of the *Laws* only addresses the ὕβρις of godlessness, or ἀσέβεια.[7] In most cases,

2 For an overview of the main principles and branches of natural theology, see Craig and Moreland 2009.

3 See Mayhew 2008, 6–7. For a survey of the theology of the *Laws* and important corollaries, see Mayhew 2010. On the importance of rationally underpinned religion for the build-up of common values, establishing close social contacts, and for the overall well-being of Plato's city as envisioned both in the *Republic* and in the *Laws*, see Schofield 2006, 282–331.

4 For the five types of hubris recognised by the Athenian, see *Leg*. 884a–885a, and Schöpsdau 2011, 365–366.

5 See 884a6.

6 See 886e–887c and 890b–d. For an earlier, detailed statement of the same principle, see 719e–723d. The preamble seeks to create a more cooperative frame of mind in the readers, introduces them to the legislation's details and purpose, and thus enables the laws not only to demand, but also to command respect. On preludes and persuasion in the *Laws*, see Taylor 1949, 464–465 and 475; Schofield 2006, 319–321; Mayhew 2008, 4 and 59–60. For a detailed discussion of the nature of persuasion, and the thesis that Plato in the *Laws* envisaged a concept of rational persuasion as the best way to steer human beings towards the right path, see Bobonich 1991.

7 For the extraordinary importance of true piety for the city of Magnesia, and the reasons behind the criminal liability of impiety, see Schöpsdau 2011, 366–367 and 369–370, respectively.

it is not committed voluntarily,[8] but instead stems from three possible misapprehensions, which, in increasing order of severity, are the following: (a) plain atheism – the belief that gods do not exist; (b) deism[9] – the doctrine that gods do exist, but are indifferent to the good and the bad caused and experienced by humans; (c) gross commercialisation of religious practice, or the conviction that unjust men can escape divine punishment by offering sacrifices and supplications (885b).[10] Plato's three objectives in the lengthy proem of *Laws* X respond to these three false theological beliefs. The objectives in question are: (i) to prove that the gods do exist; (ii) to prove that they are mindful of human affairs; (iii) to prove that they are not receptive to bribery.[11] Thus, in order to establish true theology, it is not enough to prove that the gods exist; 'that they are good and honour justice differently from men' – ὡς θεοί τ' εἰσὶν καὶ ἀγαθοί, δίκην τιμῶντες διαφερόντως ἀνθρώπων (887b7–8) must also be established. Two significant obstacles on this path are 'the old mythology and the new philosophy',[12] that is, the works of the ancient poets, and those of the Pre-Socratic φυσικοί. The latter group of thinkers is responsible for the blunders of atheism and deism (886b–e),[13] which implies that the blame for the commercialisation of religious practice is laid upon the heads of the poets.

Plato proceeds to fulfil his three objectives, starting with the proof for the existence of God. He resorts to the introduction of a rather complex line of reasoning, which may be named the Argument from Self-generated Motion

8 See 885a4–6.

9 Following Mayhew. Taylor calls this misapprehension 'Epicureanism', although the Epicureans, of course, never considered their attitude towards the gods as an expression of impiety, but as a virtue, i.e., as the confirmation of divine blessedness, goodness, and transcendence in relation to the world and the actions of mortals. See Epicurus' *Principal Doctrines* I, DL X.123–124, cf. DL X. 97.

10 The same three 'heresies' are listed in *Republic* 365d. For a running commentary on the *Laws* passages where Plato brings up these offences towards the gods, see Schöpsdau 2011, 374–379.

11 Both the religious violations and their remedies are closely related to the aforementioned three major theological ideas. Thus, the denial of (a) and (i) is identical to (1); the denial of (b) and (c), as well as (ii) and (iii) fits with (2), while (3) is the natural effect of the denial of (c), (iii), and (2).

12 England 1921, 447.

13 The cosmologies and the physical doctrines of the philosophers and men of science led the Athenian initially to reject Clinias' Argument from Design (*Leg.* 886a); later, after he has demonstrated that the heavenly bodies are not just earth and stone but instead souls and gods, the Athenian does not question the persuasive nature of the Argument (see 966e–967e, where both the priority of the soul and the orderliness of the heavenly arrangement are invoked as confirmations of the validity of theism). For a precise statement and brief analysis of Clinias' Argument from Design and the Argument from *consensus gentium*, see Mayhew 2008, 61–63.

(893b–899c), developed by the anonymous Athenian, who is also the main speaker of the *Laws*. His deductions commence with a claim about motion: moving things are set into motion by other moving things capable of imparting motion, but incapable of self-motion. Since it is impossible to conceive an infinite chain of motion transmission, there must be an initial cause for the sequence of motions, characterised by self-generated motion. This is, in essence, the way in which Plato pinpoints the source of all motion, and concludes that this principle is the soul. Common sense teaches us that only living things are capable of self-motion, and that they are alive on account of the presence of soul. Therefore, all motion is ultimately attributable to soul, and thus soul may be considered as the fundamental principle and the original source of all motion, including generation, change, and destruction.[14] Furthermore, because the heavenly bodies are in motion, they also must be operated by souls: good souls, who act purposefully and for the benefit of the living creatures inhabiting the universe, as is made obvious by the heaven's orderliness and beauty. That these souls are gods is self-evident, and the *dramatis personae* of the *Laws* – the Athenian, Clinias the Cretan, and Megillus the Spartan – all readily accept this deduction.[15]

Once the theistic position has been secured, it becomes easy to prove that the gods are neither indifferent nor venal. Plato has already established that the gods, who control natural phenomena and celestial bodies, have assumed the duty to watch over the universe. However, an objection arises: this cannot be true, since one can often witness the unjust prospering at the expense of the virtuous – for example, a ruthless tyrant snatching power from the hands of the meek and cultured citizens of a city, and enjoying many comforts and unrestrained power, while his subjects suffer various afflictions. No just and benevolent caretaker would allow such injustice; it must be, therefore, that the gods, although they do exist, have no interest in human affairs. To counter this objection, the Athenian could indicate that his argument for the existence of God has also proven that the deity is good – since everything in the universe

14 See, e.g., *Leg.* 896b2–3: ψυχὴ τῶν πάντων, γενομένη γε ἀρχὴ κινήσεως – 'soul is most ancient of all things, being the principle of motion'. This reiterates the doctrine established in *Phaedrus* 245c5–9, where soul is also the origin and principle of motion (πηγὴ καὶ ἀρχὴ κινήσεως, 245c9). This rule, however, does have an exception: the pre-cosmic disorderly motion of the eidetic traces in the χώρα. See Ilievski 2013.

15 See *Leg.* 899b7–c1. For Plato's considerations about atheists, including a detailed presentation of his position, and a description of the ten kinds of motion and step by step analysis of the argument, see Mayhew 2008, 76–155 and Schöpsdau 2011, 379–427. For a discussion of the first part of the argument, which establishes the priority of self-motion over mechanical motion, see Carone 2005, 164–170.

moves according to the principles of orderliness and rationality. This assertion remains no more than implicit among the considerations leading to the conclusion that the gods do care about, and are involved with, humans and other minute parts of the universe. And yet, the Athenian did phrase a related argument explicitly only two Stephanus pages earlier:

> Then, which of the two kinds of soul should we say has come to possess power over heaven, and earth, and the entire circular motion? The rational one full of virtue, or the one that hasn't acquired either of the two?[16] […] It is clear that one must say that the best soul takes care of the entire cosmos and leads it along an equally good course.[17]

Even without this demonstration, Plato has at his disposal and could rely on the earlier axioms from *Republic* II and from the *Timaeus* to confirm the presence of absolute goodness in the deity and the exclusion of the contrary property. These premises are crucial for the Athenian's second argument, and he assumes that they are undeniably true as he proceeds.

Any person considered to be good ought to possess virtues that qualify him or her as such – the exercise of reason, moderation, courage, justice – and ought to avoid their opposites, since they are shameful, while virtues are noble.[18] Here, Plato expresses another significant theodicean idea, reminiscent of *Resp.* 379c2–7 and *Tht.* 176a5–8: 'And those qualities belong to us, since, being bad as they are, we shall say that the gods cannot have a great, nor even a tiny, share of them'.[19] Neglect and idleness are included among vices, and they may be identified as the main reasons why a guardian or caretaker would be careless with respect to their duty (901b–c). This is true of mortals, and all the more so of gods who are not only perfectly virtuous, but also by nature incapable to be bad or possess vices. Thus, Plato's second argument is simple and straightforward: the gods are supremely good, devoid of any vice; neglect, idleness and laziness are vices; therefore, it is impossible that the gods should neglect (ἀμέλειν) even the minutest detail in the universe, i.e., they show concern for

16 897b7–c1.

17 δῆλον ὡς τὴν ἀρίστην ψυχὴν φατέον ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τοῦ κόσμου παντὸς καὶ ἄγειν αὐτὸν τὴν τοιαύτην ὁδὸν ἐκείνην, 897c7–9. The rationale behind this conclusion is the idea that the revolutions of the cosmos and its parts reflects the edicts of Intellect. Were it otherwise, i.e., were the motions of the universe distorted and disorderly, it would indicate that a bad soul is in charge of everything.

18 τὰ μὲν αἰσχρὰ τούτων, τὰ δὲ καλά, 900e4.

19 καὶ τῶν μὲν προσήκειν ἡμῖν, εἴπερ, ὁπόσα φλαῦρα, θεοῖς δὲ οὔτε μέγα οὔτε σμικρὸν τῶν τοιούτων μετὸν ἐροῦμεν, 900e6–8.

the well-being of the sentient beings (899d–905d). To put it differently, Plato's gods, in the *Laws* and as a rule, exercise providential care for the embodied souls under their jurisdiction. The issue of the prosperity of the wicked and the subsequent wretchedness of the meek is a 'Theodizee-Problem'.[20] By articulating this problem, Plato sows the seeds of his theodicy which are going to germinate before the argument against the heedlessness of the gods will have concluded. This will be the focus of the next section.

Plato counters the third misapprehension, according to which the gods are susceptible to be bribed with gifts, sacrifices, and libations, by positing premises similar to those above: the gods are supremely virtuous guardians; no good guardian may succumb to bribery from powerful but unjust men, leaving his dependents unprotected;[21] therefore, it is not possible for lustful and greedy men to use gifts to influence the gods' good judgment and distribution of justice, or to entice the gods to turn a blind eye to their transgressions (905d–907b).[22] By accepting these three truths about the gods – namely that their existence is a demonstrable fact, their benevolence and care spreads throughout the universe, and they are incorruptible – the citizens of Magnesia will save themselves from committing unholy acts in words or deeds, voluntarily or by mistake (885b5). On the other hand, the stubborn, impious citizens who reject these truths and persevere in their evil ways are to be subjected to stringent laws and severe punishments (907d–910d).

5.2 Plato and the Aesthetic Theme

Leaving aside the question of whether Plato's endeavours to construct a theology based on reason and to overthrow the atheistic and pseudo-religious stances are successful or not, we shall now turn to *Laws* 903b1–905d3, the most important section for the reconstruction of the dialogue's theodicy. It occurs during the exchange with the hypothetical deist – after the main line of the argument has reached its conclusion.[23] This section is introduced by the Athenian asserting that he has already given the most suitable answer to the man who used to accuse the gods of negligence; his arguments (τοῖς λόγοις)

20 Schöpsdau 2011, 427.

21 To admit the opposite would equate the gods to shepherds and watchdogs who sacrifice their flock to the wolves in exchange for a share of the prey (906d–e), a very impious thought. Not even human and animal guardians would commit such a crime.

22 For a detailed discussion of the last two arguments see Mayhew 2008, 155–192.

23 For a running commentary on this section, see Schöpsdau 2011, 432–444.

compelled this man to admit that he was wrong. Clinias welcomes this claim with unreserved approval (903a7–b1). And yet, the Athenian believes that they need further 'words of counsel to act as a charm',[24] or 'a form of words to *charm* him into agreement',[25] or 'some mythic incantations'[26] – ἐπῳδῶν γε μὴν προσδεῖσθαί μοι δοκεῖ μύθων ἔτι τινῶν (903b1–2).

A distinguished scholar and commentator is adamant that what follows, namely the account of the providential care of the deities and their blamelessness for the badness in the world is a *myth*, as opposed to the previously offered *arguments*. He claims that the function of this myth is similar to that of the Myth of Er: it is included for the benefit of 'those people (especially the young) who cannot understand or respond to serious philosophical argument'.[27] This idea, however, should not be pressed too far. For one thing, the young were the imagined audience of the Athenian throughout the prolonged proem. What is more, the use of the term 'myth', unless supported by a precise definition,[28] might imply that the Athenian is going to resort to some non-rational means of persuasion; but it is not the case.

First, section 903b–905d is not properly a mythical tale. The souls' journey through the Plain of Oblivion in the Myth of Er, or the Demiurge's mixing bowl filled with soul-ingredients in the *Timaeus* are mythical episodes within symbolic narratives, whereas the Athenian's account here contains but few mythical elements, unless Plato's doctrines of divine providential care and transmigration be reduced to mere metaphors. The only element that can be loosely called mythical appears at 904d–e, where Hades and the Olympians are mentioned – the latter in a quotation from Homer.[29] However, within the context of the *Laws*, they are not to be taken merely as a mythical τόπος and entities. As a matter of fact, this is not specific to the *Laws* only: Plato, regardless his personal understanding and beliefs, openly and strongly encouraged the public to embrace the reformed Olympian religion – a point that was developed in section 1.3 above.

In addition, the grammar and context of the above sentence support the understanding of μῦθοι in its primary meaning as 'words' or 'speeches', for the

24 Bury, 1926.

25 Saunders, 1970.

26 Mayhew 2008, Pangle 1988.

27 Mayhew 2008, 170. For a more balanced opinion, see Schöpsdau 2011, 432.

28 'What Plato would and would not call a *muthos* is a notoriously complex question, and one that probably cannot receive a single answer', Betegh 2009, 85, footnote 9. For some reflections on the issue, see 2.1 above.

29 Hades appears once again at 905b1.

following reasons: (a) the word is in the plural: if it referred to what follows as a myth, it would be in the singular; (b) the Athenian is talking of μῦθοι that are ἐπῳδοί, not vice versa: μῦθοι is the noun, ἐπῳδοί the modifier, therefore 'mythical incantations' is not an accurate translation. Bury's and Saunders' renditions are better, where substituting 'myths' for 'words' would make the sentence sound awkward; (c) immediately after proposing that they need some additional words or speeches capable of charming the deist into agreement, the Athenian, in answer to Clinias' question 'which ones, my good man?', says that they should persuade the young man by arguments, or discourses – πείθωμεν τὸν νεανίαν τοῖς λόγοις (903b4).

Second, the Athenian's speech at 903b–905d is no less 'rational' than the arguments that preceded it; 'the 'mythic incantation' that Plato gives is, in fact, an argument: it is an appeal to the atheist to change his mind on the basis of rational considerations'.[30] According to England, Plato does not offer something less, but something *more* than a proof based on sound logic: 'To win him thoroughly on our side we want more than argument; we must appeal to his soul as well as to his reason; we will use ἐπῳδοὶ μῦθοι – put the case in such a way as to *charm* him into a full agreement with us'.[31] This speech has the power to charm and mesmerise because: unlike the preceding argument, it does not consist of series of deductions, but is presented as an attractive narrative, full of epithets and tropes; it directly addresses the emotions of the listener, by appealing to his personal mental state and convictions (903c1, 903d1, 905c), by evoking his immediate self-interest (903d1–2), by containing threats (904c10–d4, 905a), and by promising rewards and giving hope (904d4–e1); most importantly, while the previous argumentation demonstrated that the gods *could not* be neglectful of human affairs and as such *would not* turn a blind eye to injustice, 903b–905d adopts the positive point of view to demonstrate that, on the contrary, and despite appearances, the gods *are* very much involved and deeply interested in securing the victory of justice. In this section of the *Laws*, the mysterious workings of Providence are revealed.[32]

Determining the genre of the narrative embedded in the theodicean passages of *Laws* x comes second, of course, to analysing their significant and revealing contents. So far in this study were made, among others, the following two claims: Plato does have a theodicy, and a very important part of it is

30 Bobonich 1991, 374.
31 England 1921, 490.
32 Cf. Saunders 1973, 233. He also considers the relevant passages of the *Laws* x as a myth, but finds the latter incompatible with other Platonic eschatological myths, and writes that 'the prevailing tone of the myth is drily philosophical'.

contained in the *Laws*. The first of these statements has been constantly under scrutiny, and sufficiently, by now, substantiated, while the following analysis of the crucial section of *Laws* X, 903b–905d, addresses the second one. As a matter of fact, some of the previous critics have recognised that Plato's Athenian here unveils a theodicy. Among them is Schöpsdau, mentioned above,[33] while Richard Mohr may be the most fervent advocate of this thesis: 'This paper offers some general reflections on the nature of *Laws* X as a theodicy'.[34] Despite the reluctance of some scholars, the claim that *Laws* X offers a theodicy seems as uncontroversial as the first one, i.e., that Plato did put in writing some of his thoughts related to the defence of God's goodness in the face of evil.

The Athenian outlines the position of the deists at the beginning of his argument against them: they believe that the gods exist, but despise and neglect human affairs – εἶναι μὲν δοκεῖν αὐτούς, τῶν δὲ ἀνθρωπίνων καταφρονεῖν καὶ ἀμελεῖν πραγμάτων (900b1–3).[35] Their belief results from their lack of reason, or short-sightedness (ἀλογία), and from their inability to find fault with the gods (οὐ δυνάμενος δυσχεραίνειν θεούς, 900a8–9)[36] – which is in itself laudable and a sign of good character. This inability stems from the fact that the deist enjoys some kinship with the divine (συγγένειά τις ἴσως σε θεία, 899d7); as such, he is unwilling to isolate the gods as causes of badness – μέμφεσθαι μὲν θεοὺς ὡς αἰτίους ὄντας τῶν τοιούτων διὰ συγγένειαν οὐκ ἂν ἐθέλων (900a6–7). Yet, this flawed reasoning fools the deist into believing that bad people might become happy by performing wicked deeds. As a result, the deist, because he refuses to consider the gods responsible for this undeserved happiness and for the suffering of the just connected to it, reaches the conclusion that the gods do not oversee nor manage human affairs.[37]

Consequently, it appears that deist too, to a degree, is concerned with exculpating the gods. He believes that (a) they exist; (b) they are good; and (c) he tries to explain the obvious presence of injustice and evil without invoking them as an explanans. However, for Plato, this reasoning, instead of absolving the gods from responsibility, incriminates them further, by denying indirectly

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33 See p. 160 above.

34 Mohr 2005, 197. Another one is Armstrong, 1967, 38. See also Dombrowski 2005, 89–90, Saunders 1994, 202 and Taylor 1938, 184.

35 See also 899d5–6: '[the deist] believes that the gods exist, but that they are unconcerned with human affairs' – τὸν δὲ ἡγούμενον μὲν θεοὺς εἶναι, μὴ φροντίζειν δὲ αὐτοὺς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων.

36 For an analysis of these two factors, see Mayhew 2008, 155–159.

37 Mayhew 2008, 158 writes: 'Deism occurs in the mind of a youth whose reason is sufficient to prevent him from believing that the gods are capable of evil (or that the gods do not exist), and yet whose reasoning is flawed enough to conclude that evil men can be happy'.

their benevolent and perfectly virtuous nature. Therefore, the Athenian presents an alternative view on the matter, i.e., a much more firmly sustained theodicy. It relies on some of Plato's earlier solutions to the problem of evil, but also contains the seeds of important theodicean strategies, later widely adopted and employed by philosophers and theologians.

Thus, although the Solution from Personal Responsibility, developed in the Myth of Er and in the *Timaeus*, figures prominently in the theodicy of *Laws* x, the overarching approach is innovative, and this new theodicean strategy will become known as the Aesthetic Solution to the problem of evil. Rebuking his imaginary interlocutor who holds that God fails to perform his duty properly since he tolerates the presence of evil, Plato's Athenian says the following:

> The caretaker (ἐπιμελουμένος) of the universe has ordered together (συντεταγμένα)[38] everything for the salvation and goodness of the Whole (πρὸς τὴν σωτηρίαν καὶ ἀρετὴν τοῦ ὅλου), where also each individual part, according to its ability (τὸ μέρος εἰς δύναμιν ἕκαστον),[39] suffers and does what is suitable for it. They have all severally, down to the tiniest part, been assigned rulers (ἄρχοντες) of each of their passive and active states, who have brought their task to perfection, up to the utmost function (εἰς μερισμὸν τὸν ἔσχατον τέλος ἀπειργασμένοι). (903b4–c1)

This integrated picture of the universe and all its constituents highlights the overall goodness of the Whole, which is not marred, but enhanced, by the apparent ugliness or badness of its smaller parts. From the point of view of the 'caretaker of the universe',[40] and, even more importantly, of each of the conscious parts raised to their genuine knowledge, the universe is wholly good. Those not yet awakened to this truth must overcome their ignorance and transfer their focus from themselves to the Whole.[41]

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38 'The συν- in συντεταγμένα conveys the notion that all things are fitted into a consistent system', England 1921, 490.

39 'εἰς δύναμιν implies that the perfection of the system is limited by the powers of individual creatures', England 1921, 490.

40 ὁ τοῦ παντὸς ἐπιμελούμενος. See 903b4–5, 904a3–4.

41 As *Tim.* 43a–44c suggests, a life of selfishness and affliction starts with the violent surge of affections that overwhelm the individual soul at its very birth. The function of the soul's reason is disrupted, and it is continually distracted by its efforts to avoid unpleasant sensations, and replace them with pleasant ones. Acquiring a proper education in astronomy and philosophy provides the ability to bring the circles of the Different and the Same in harmony with the revolutions of the heavens, and thus transcend the petty individual concerns, and experience unity with the cosmos.

> Now then, you perverse fellow, one such part – a mere speck that nevertheless constantly contributes to the good of the whole – is you,[42] you who have forgotten that nothing is created except to provide the entire universe with a life of prosperity. You forgot that the creation is not for your benefit: *you* exist for the sake of the universe.[43] (tr. Saunders 1970, 437)

This is an almost classical exposition of the Aesthetic Theme, which asserts that '[s]een in its totality from the ultimate standpoint of the Creator, the universe is wholly good; for even the evil within it is made to contribute to the complex perfection of the Whole'.[44] The Aesthetic Theme was copiously used by the Stoics,[45] and acquired its complete form in the works of Plotinus. Next it was adopted by St. Augustine, who made it famous and influential to the present day.[46] The artistic analogies, including drama, visual art and music – to which the Aesthetic Solution owes its name – were also used by the Stoics and later developed in detail by Plotinus.[47] His version of the Aesthetic theme is

42 Carone 2005, 179 translates: 'one of these portions [which have rulers] is also yours, and, however small, tends towards the whole and always looks to it', and considers that the human beings should be counted among the ἄρχοντες of the previous quotation (see also Carone 1994, 291 and England 1921, 491, who translates ἄρχοντες as 'men'). Although this interpretation suits Carone's general (and receivable) thesis that, if a soul is responsible for the evil in the universe, then it must be a human, not a cosmic soul, and although the grammar of the sentence at 903c1–2 allows the above translation, the context of the passage is not in favour of it. Those 'rulers' must be the younger gods, or the created gods (to use Timean phrases), because they are those who confer perfection (τέλος) to all the constituents of the universe placed under their care, as far as that is possible. The stubborn youth in the Athenian's address is one of those parts, not an ἄρχων of some portion of the universe, because the passage does not refer to bad, but only to good rulers. See also Mayhew 2008, 71, as well as his and Bury's rendition of 903c1–2. Cf. Schöpsdau 2011, 434.

43 ὧν ἓν καὶ τὸ σόν, ὦ σχέτλιε, μόριον εἰς τὸ πᾶν συντείνει βλέπον ἀεί, καίπερ πάνσμικρον ὄν, σὲ δὲ λέληθεν περὶ τοῦτο αὐτὸ ὡς γένεσις ἕνεκα ἐκείνου γίγνεται πᾶσα, ὅπως ᾖ τῷ τοῦ παντὸς βίῳ ὑπάρχουσα εὐδαίμων οὐσία, οὐχ ἕνεκα σοῦ γιγνομένη, σὺ δ' ἕνεκα ἐκείνου, 903c1–5.

44 Hick 2010, 82. He also refers the reader to Plato: 'For the Platonic starting-point of this strand of thought, see Plato's *Laws* 903', Hick 2010, 83.

45 Such as Ariston of Chios (DL VII. 160), Chrysippus (SVF II.1181), Epictetus (*Ench.* 17, 31; *Epict. diss.* I.12), Marcus Aurelius (*Med.* III.8, VI.39–45, XII.36). Epictetus and Aurelius seem particularly inspired by Plato: they both mention and criticise 'the deist fallacy', while Epictetus also confronts the outright atheist's position – as explained above, these are the first and second theological errors that Plato is trying to counter in *Laws* X.

46 For St. Augustine's utilisation of the Aesthetic Theme in his theodicy, see Hick 2010, 82–89.

47 For the Platonic origins of even those images and examples from the world of art, see Ilievski 2013, 30–31.

the most thorough and elaborate in Graeco-Roman (non-Christian) Antiquity. It is perhaps useful for the understanding of the Aesthetic Solution to take a quick look at the version developed by Plotinus, and then return to Plato's pioneering work. The opening of Plotinus' account is similar to Plato's, although more complex:

> So from Intellect which is one (ἐξ ἑνὸς νοῦ), and the formative principle that proceeds from it (τοῦ ἀπ› αὐτοῦ λόγου), this All has arisen and separated its parts, and of necessity some became friendly and gentle, others hostile and at war, and some did harm to each other willingly, some, too, unwillingly, and some by their destruction brought about the coming into being of others, and over them all as they acted and were acted upon in these kind of ways they began a single melody, each of them uttering their own sounds, and the forming principle over them producing the melody and the single ordering of all together to the whole. (*Enn.* III.2.2.24–31, tr. Armstrong 1980, 49)

Later in the same treatise, while laying out his arguments, Plotinus employs a wide variety of artistic analogies, meant to bring closer to the reader's attention the innate harmony, the spotless beauty, and the overall perfection of the Whole, unmarred by the seemingly faulty and blemished parts. He includes images of painting (*Enn.* III.2.11.9–12), theatre (III.2.11.13–17, and more strikingly III.2.15.44–47), dance (III.2.17.9–12), and music (III.2.17.70–75), while III.2.16.23–60 combines elements from theatre, dance, and music. All these passages illustrate the main argument of this particular approach to the problem of evil: each and every part of the Whole plays its assigned role in the cosmic drama, and even if it outwardly appears to be distorted, ugly, or despicable, it still enhances the overall goodness of the world, just as the righteous, fair, and admirable parts do.

Now, the contrast between the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, present in the universe, may be understood as coming in two distinct shades: that of complementarity, and of 'Heraclitean opposites'. The first approach relies on the truism that even an unattractive colour adds to the beauty of the overall painting when suitably applied by a skilful artist; similarly silence, as a dramatic pause, may become an embellishment in music. The second approach invokes a much stronger thesis: the opposites of good and bad are so strongly intertwined that they may be considered a type of *spiritus movens* of the cosmic events, not contingent, but necessary ingredients in the universal harmony. Neither Plato nor Plotinus resort to the doctrine of Heraclitean opposites to explain the presence of evil. This strategy states that the good and

the bad are interdependent; in other words, evil, a logical and metaphysical counterpart of good, becomes a prerequisite to its very existence. This does not suit Plato's system;[48] therefore the Platonic Aesthetic Solution favours the complementarity thesis, according to which the minute fragments of the Whole – in this case, the living entities – each endowed with a degree of creative power, fulfil their roles in the best possible way, because they all act under the wise supervision of God. In this way, although a particular fragment might appear to be an aberration, although it might seem to inflict or suffer pain and injustice, *sub specie dei*, both it and all the rest contribute to the overall goodness and beauty of the world – which is, as indicated in the *Timaeus*, a living rational entity under the providential care of God. Through the unifying power of its goal-directedness, the world as a whole allows the discordant tones sometimes produced by its components to blend seamlessly into a perfect, harmonious symphony.

Besides explaining to the wayward youth his part-to-whole place in the universe, the Athenian also reminds him that he exists for the sake of the totality, and not *vice versa*. Therefore, the deist should not demand anything for himself, but should always be ready to renounce his share for the overall good (903c2–4). At first glance, this exhortation sounds as a poor consolation to the suffering humans and animals, and it does not appear very helpful for the attempt to solve the problem of evil. What is more, to illustrate his point, the Athenian offers an example that does not seem fitting either. He talks of craftsmen and doctors who always produce and heal parts while having in mind the good of the Whole, not of the parts themselves (903c5–d1). Although the analogy obviously makes sense, it also presents a contradiction to a recent statement from the *Laws*, according to which no good doctor (or captain, general, or mason) should focus exclusively on the whole and neglect the parts (902d–e). While the analogy of 903c5–d1 almost denies any intrinsic value to

48 See 3.2.3 and 2.2.5 above. Nevertheless, it would suit the Stoics', according to the testimony of Gellius (SVF II.1169): Chrysippus believed that goodness and badness are inseparably connected, both in a logico-epistemological, and in an ontological sense. As for the former, he claims that the notions of justice, moderation, etc., cannot be understood without their correlative notions, i.e., their opposites. With respect to the ontological sense of the interrelatedness of the good and the evil, he falls back on Plato's short 'Aesopian myth' of the *Phaedo* 60a–c, in which pain and pleasure are depicted as Siamese twins joined at the crowns of their heads, so that when a person obtains one of them, the other inevitably follows. Chrysippus concludes that good and evil cannot exist without each other: if one is eliminated, the other will be eliminated as well (*si tuleris unum, abstuleris utrumque*). This is, however, a misreading of the myth. Plato does not suggest that the good cannot exist without the bad, but that in this world badness cannot be avoided.

the individual, the statement of 902d–e supports the idea of the omnipresence of divine providence, and the thesis that God cares for the components as much as for the Whole. What is more, the above analogy is not wholly applicable to the matter in question: although a doctor would indeed treat a leg for the sake of the body, and not for its own sake, the leg, unlike the addressee of the Athenian's speech, is neither conscious, nor aware that it is a separate part. Mayhew rightly identifies basically the same idea, although related to Plato's political philosophy, in *Republic* 420b–c, which states that the purpose of establishing a city is to promote the happiness not of one group of citizens, but of the whole city instead.[49] This principle, however, is to be embraced and implemented by the almost super-human guardians, who may be found only in the hypothetical ideal state. It seems unlikely that the young man, whose soul is riddled with misunderstandings, should be able to find solace in this. Marcus Aurelius, in *Med.* VI.45, reiterates the part-for-the-sake-of-the-whole doctrine, without much comment or explanation. More recently, Lewis, in his commentary to *Laws* X, at first acknowledges the idea as 'unquestionably true', only to reveal later his distaste for it, pronounce it fatalistic and non-Christian, and place his preference on the opposite, 'equally true' doctrine that the whole is made for the parts[50] – which is something that Plato never actually wrote.

So, the message conveyed in the Athenian's advice to the young deist is not wholly clear. Is he advocating some dogma of abstract munificence and complete renunciation of personal happiness for the sake of self-forgetting contemplation of the cosmic grandeur? Already the subsequent line reveals that, despite appearances to the contrary, and the somewhat unhappy analogy, it is not so: 'But you feel greatly irritated, not knowing in what manner that which is best for the Whole about you, turns out to be so for you as well, because of the way of your common origin'.[51] The 'common origin', or the 'common generation' (κοινῆς γενέσεως) probably refers here to the kinship of the individual with the World Soul.[52] Human beings, represented by the young deist, are for the majority unaware of their shared origin with the World Soul, and consequently do not know that real happiness lies in harmonising the motions of their soul-circles with those of the cosmic one. This harmonisation or ordering of the circles of the Same and the Different allows the practitioner to entertain immortal and celestial thoughts (*Tim.* 90b–d), an activity

49 See Mayhew 2008, 172. England 1921, 491 highlights the general principle, as given in *Phlb.* 54c4: 'all generation taken together takes place for the sake of being as a whole'.

50 Lewis 1845, 286–290.

51 σὺ δὲ ἀγανακτεῖς, ἀγνοῶν ὅπῃ τὸ περὶ σὲ ἄριστον τῷ παντὶ συμβαίνει καὶ σοὶ κατὰ δύναμιν τὴν τῆς κοινῆς γενέσεως, 903d1–3.

52 See *Tim.* 41d.

that brings the embodied soul as close to the divine as possible. In other words, since perfect rationality is the highest good for the living being which is the cosmos, so it is also for the individual living entity as well. It must strive to become akin to God by imitating his virtue and rationality.

However, it is often difficult to make those whose souls are lulled by false security and pleasure accept this Platonic tenet. That being the case, perhaps the exposure to injustice and pain should not be taken as something altogether negative. Such states of affairs do not betray divine neglect; actually, they serve the individual's ultimate good. The divinity is supremely benevolent and just; therefore, the misfortunes endured by living entities must have their place and purpose in the broader picture. The sufferings of the miscreants are not problematic since they clearly are useful to them,[53] while the sufferings of the gentle must be their punishment for some misdeed committed in a previous life.[54] Such Rhadamanthine punishment purifies the soul from the unwanted effects of its previous misbehaviour[55] and makes it wiser by administrating the necessary disciplinary measures.[56] The overall organisation of the cosmos is therefore justifiable and the best, even when it come to the suffering of both the guilty and the just. Even unpleasant experiences are valuable and good, and the gods, although they are the instigators of suffering in the form of punishment, remain blameless. Their rule and actions are always for the best, in this case, for the awakening of the embodied souls to their true nature.[57]

5.3 Inescapability of Divine Justice and Personal Responsibility

Knowledge that their current suffering has a purifying and educational purpose is not the only solace offered to the oppressed, but righteous, individuals: they also have the assurance of a good end, either in this lifetime or in the next,

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53 See *Grg*. 525b7–c1 where it is said that rightful punishment improves those who are curable: 'through sufferings and distress do they receive their redemption both in this world and in the next, for there is no other way to be set free from wrongdoings'. The suffering of the incurable offenders is also beneficial, inasmuch as it provides an example to others.

54 See *Resp.* 612e8–613c2.

55 See *Resp.* 380b1–2 – 'god was doing just and good things, while those punished gained a benefit'.

56 See *Rep*. 619c–d, where the souls coming from the heavenly region and who have not seen and endured suffering are depicted as prone to make much worse choices than those who have suffered punishment.

57 A very interesting alternative interpretation is offered by Bobonich 2002, 433: 'god aims at what is best and it is the fact that this goal is best should also be our reason for pursuing it. [...] the theology of Book 10 invites the citizen to see fostering virtue as sharing in god's plan for the universe as a whole'.

'for the gods never neglect he who eagerly wishes to become just and to make himself as godlike as possible for a human by pursuing virtue'.[58] Exactly the opposite applies to the immoral ruffians who enjoy underserved prosperity.[59] Therefore, the cosmos is organised so as to provide the necessary purification and education, and to rectify promptly and without failure the seeming injustice witnessed by the deist. This last consideration introduces an additional attempt to answer the problem of evil within the overarching Aesthetic Theme of the section. It is a theodicean strategy that may be named the 'Justice in the Afterlife Solution', and the Athenian explicates it as follows:

> And since a soul is allied to different bodies at different times, and perpetually undergoes all sorts of changes, either self-imposed or produced by some other soul, the divine checkers-player has nothing else to do (οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἔργον τῷ πεττευτῇ λείπεται)[60] except promote a soul that has better character (ἦθος) to a better place, and relegate one with worse to an inferior, as is appropriate in each case (κατὰ τὸ πρέπον αὐτῶν ἕκαστον), so that they all meet the fate they deserve (ἵνα τῆς προσηκούσης μοίρας λαγχάνῃ). (903d3–e1, tr. Saunders 1970, 437–438, slightly modified)

Here we have a confirmation of faith that everything will be well in the end, that all wrongs will be rectified. This is the only possible outcome, once it is agreed that the gods exist, that they are good, and that they care for the creation, as Plato has argued throughout *Laws* x. However, in the above, and in the subsequent passages of the *Laws* it is described how the wrongs are actually redressed: the Athenian assures the deist that justice will prevail, if not in this life, then in the next. Every soul is joined to a succession of different bodies because it would be contrary to nature to remain un-embodied, and because it must constantly undergo the cycle of transmigration.[61] The gods place the soul in such a body and in such a realm as to ensure that it will obtain

58 οὐ γὰρ δὴ ὑπό γε θεῶν ποτε ἀμελεῖται ὃς ἂν προθυμεῖσθαι ἐθέλῃ δίκαιος γίγνεσθαι καὶ ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῷ, *Resp.* 613a7–b1. See also *Leg.* 716b–d, where the just person is said to be a follower of God, even his friend on account of being like him (θεῷ φίλος, ὅμοιος γάρ, 716d2).

59 See *Resp.* 613b4, *Leg.* 716e2–3. What is more, Plato in *Laws* 716a–b explains that θεός and δίκη work in unison to make sure that the foolish, prideful, and arrogant will receive divine vengeance for their transgressions, as has been ordained.

60 For an illuminating interpretation of the board game metaphor, see Schöpsdau 2011, 435.

61 And yet the cycle may be broken, and the process of transmigration abandoned for good – see *Phd.* 114c, *Tim.* 42b. On reincarnation in Plato and in some of his predecessors, see Bussanich 2016.

the appropriate lot, good and auspicious for the virtuous, bad and frightening for the wicked. In the eschatological tale of the Myth of Er and the transmigration account of *Timaeus* 41e–42d, Plato emphasised that each soul is the maker of its own fate, which in turn determines the body and realm in which it is placed.[62] Thus the Justice in the Afterlife Solution is complemented by the notorious and closely connected ideas of metempsychosis, of the souls' personal responsibility for their tribulations, and of the blamelessness and aloofness of the divine.

Indeed, *Laws* 903d–904c clearly indicates that the distribution of justice takes place with minimal involvement from the gods. They are overseers, whose role is but to facilitate the sprouting of the individual's karma-seeds, so to say.[63] Rewards and punishments, promotions and demotions, are all part of a system that functions almost automatically: 'the process [...] seems to be automatic or semi-automatic, with perhaps some remote control from a supervisor who may have done no more than construct the system in the first place, which thereafter operates by virtue of its own built-in mechanisms'.[64] This is suggested by the sentence 'no other function is left for the divine checkers-player' above, and by the difficult passage 903e3–904a4, which professes to explain how the management of universal justice is a 'marvellously easy' task

62 Mayhew 2008, 173, *contra* England 1912, 492, correctly considers that the process of the soul changing bodies and characters, which may be either self-imposed or caused by another agent ('[the soul] undergoes all kind of changes through itself or through another soul', 903d4–5), refers to the changes, for better or for worse, effected by the individuals themselves, and to the changes effected by their human guardians. The observation that an incompetent guardian may unwittingly contribute to the corruption of the souls of those entrusted to him prompted Plato to address the topic of education at length in the *Republic*, the *Laws*, and elsewhere. We have already encountered his worry that bad parents and teachers can do much harm to the souls of their protégés, as stated in the *Timaeus* 87b, and we have seen how the individual should be still held responsible for most of the badness he or she experiences.

63 'At each fresh γένεσις the πεττευτής has only to assign body to soul, and in so doing consider the inclination and character of the soul in question', England 1912, 493. The image of 'checkers-player or draught-player' (πεττευτής) may not be the most suitable: a draught-player moves pieces across the game-board, an activity which implies personal involvement and decision-making. On the contrary, God is not led by any personal motive, only perhaps by the determination to preserve justice and order.

64 Saunders 1973, 234. A similar tendency is very prominent in the ancient Vedic religion, in which the sacrificial ceremony (described in minute detail in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts) practically replaces the gods with its power to yield the desired fruit on its own merit (see Dasgupta 1975, 21–22 and Hiriyanna 1993, 35–39), while later (in the *Upaniṣads* and parts of the *Bhagavad-gītā*) the impersonal law of karma alone becomes responsible for protecting the moral order in the universe.

for the gods.[65] This causes them to appear detached, or aloof – not necessarily a positive or praiseworthy trait. It could possibly give rise to the concern that, although they are just, they are hard-hearted, because a benevolent person would shy from having to inflict suffering, even on the deserving. However, Plato anticipates this challenge: by emphasising the almost spontaneous character of the inter-life motion of the soul, he exempts God from being directly implicated in the punishment of the wicked, and from having the opportunity to be partial in favour of the virtuous. And fortunately, this does not endanger his status of benevolent caretaker of the universe, because the whole system has been set up and is constantly supervised by him.

The already well-known idea of personal responsibility also invalidates this objection. It is emphasised little later in the text, as the Athenian explain that the good or bad condition of each soul depends primarily on its own actions:

> But he left the causes of generation of every kind [of character] to the willings of each of us (ταῖς βουλήσεσιν ἑκάστων ἡμῶν τὰς αἰτίας).[66] For, upon whatever object we set our heart, and however we are situated in relation to soul (ὅπῃ γὰρ ἂν ἐπιθυμῇ καὶ ὁποῖός τις ὢν τὴν ψυχήν),[67] accordingly, more or less in every case, each of us becomes such for the most part. (904b8–c4)

A similar message is conveyed at 904c6–9: 'So all things that have a share in soul change, *possessing within themselves the cause of the change*, as they change, they are being borne along according to the order and law of destiny'.[68] The conception of the automatic management of the universal affairs is repeated

65 νῦν δ' ἔστι θαυμαστὴ ῥᾳστώνη τῷ τοῦ παντὸς ἐπιμελουμένῳ, 904a3–4 – 'But as the case now stands, the caretaker of the universe finds it marvellously easy'. For a discussion of the passage, see Mayhew 2008, 174–177; Saunders 1973, 238–244; Schöpsdau 2011, 436–438.

66 'The willings', which are the causes of the soul's good or bad condition, are numerous, and thus the picture presented here is much more realistic and much less deterministic than that of the Myth of Er, according to which a single act of choice determined one's fate. The overall message remains the same: God is guiltless, the responsibility is upon those who will their own choices.

67 This sentence supplements the previous one, and confirms that an individual's character is formed in accordance with his or her desires and psychological states. So, Plato seems to use βούλησις and ἐπιθυμία almost interchangeably.

68 μεταβάλλει μὲν τοίνυν πάνθ' ὅσα μέτοχά ἐστιν ψυχῆς, ἐν ἑαυτοῖς κεκτημένα τὴν τῆς μεταβολῆς αἰτίαν, μετβάλλοντα δὲ φέρεται κατὰ τὴν τῆς εἱμαρμένης τάξιν καὶ νόμον. For an analysis of this statement and of the alternative destinations of just and unjust souls, and for a comparison with the afterlife stories of the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*, see Schöpsdau 2011, 440–442.

here, alongside the confirmation of the moral agents' accountability for their actions. The soul is free to make choices, good or bad, but these choices, once made, will generate changes and motions in accordance with the pre-arranged order and law of destiny (κατὰ τὴν τῆς εἱμαρμένης τάξιν καὶ νόμον), i.e., of God[69] – a possible allusion to *Timaeus* 41e–42e, where the Demiurge acquaints the soon-to-be-embodied souls with the laws of destiny (νόμους τε τοὺς εἱμαρμένους εἶπεν αὐταῖς, 41e2–3), which he has himself established. Just as in the *Laws*, the laws described in the *Timaeus* regulate the process of the soul's promotion and demotion, which starts with its own choice of better or worse course of action, and consequently, life.

Plato highlights the Solution from Personal Responsibility again at 904d4–904e3: the moral improvement and degradation of the soul, its vices and virtues (κακίας ἢ ἀρετῆς, 904d4), are attributed to the soul's own will and to the strong influence of social interaction (διὰ τὴν αὑτῆς βούλησίν τε καὶ ὁμιλίαν γενομένην ἰσχυράν, 904d5–6).[70] The confirmation of personal responsibility, combined to the reincarnation doctrine and the pre-set Platonic 'law of karma', is another method for absolving the gods from the accusation of tolerating the daily sufferings of the innocent. The cosmic law of action and reaction is very simple: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. As cruel as it may sound, this law of destiny or karma is applicable to all, without exception, and therefore rests on the assumption that the innocents of today must have had committed misdeeds in their past lives, as was briefly mentioned in 3.2 above. Thus, the theodicy of *Laws* X, despite the introduction of the innovative over-arching outlook of the Aesthetic Theme, conforms with the theodicies of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. Responsibility is transferred from God to the individual soul: trapped by its own desires, the soul is subjugated to the cosmic law of change and inter-life motion.

Before he concludes his attempt 'to charm the young deist into agreement', the Athenian once again emphatically declares that the distribution of justice and the transfer of souls to their deserved destination is unquestionably

69 See 2.4.1–3 above for a discussion of this phenomenon.

70 The perils of un-enlightened association with relatives and guardians were discussed in 4.4 above. The Stoics also emphasise the bad influence of social interaction and of instructions received from peers or teachers (τὴν κατήχησιν τῶν συνόντων) as one of the reasons for falling away from right reason (ὄρθος λόγος) and thus for moral degradation (see DL VII.89). But even the Stoic determinists confirm that the ultimate responsibility is upon us, because, as creatures endowed with reason, we have the duty and the privilege to judge which of the external influences are beneficial, and which are harmful (see, e.g., SVF II.990). For the Stoics, moral failure ultimately arises from the failure to identify what is truly good.

inevitable. In this life, or the next, the wicked souls will join other wicked souls in unholy places, and similarly the virtuous souls will be associated with the likes of them: all shall be treated as they deserve. No one may ever boast of having escaped the gods' justice (θεῶν δίκη), nor shall anyone ever be neglected by it (οὐ γὰρ ἀμεληθήσῃ ποτὲ ὑπ› αὐτῆς, 905a4), even though they sink into the depths of the earth or soar to the heights of heaven. The guilty shall pay the gods their due penalty (τείσεις δὲ αὐτῶν τὴν προσήκουσαν τιμωρίαν, 905a6–7), whether they stay on earth, escape to Hades, or to some even more fearsome place (904e3–905b2).[71] Plato's Athenian closes his account, i.e., his debate with the deist, by recalling that the young man believed that he had detected negligence in the gods (ἀμέλειαν θεῶν, 905b6) on account of the presence of numerous instances of badness in the world – especially villains thriving and climbing to the higher ranks of society while just people suffer. He had deduced that the good gods do not interfere in the human sphere. However, the crucial error of the young deist, explains the Athenian, is his failure to perceive that these instances of badness are utilised by the gods to fulfil a higher purpose. He is consequently unable to appreciate how their role contributes to the overall good (οὐκ εἰδὼς αὐτῶν τὴν συντέλειαν ὅπῃ ποτὲ τῷ παντὶ συμβάλεται, 905b7–c1).[72]

The Athenian's firm conviction and assurance notwithstanding, a further question arises, both legitimate and pertinent: how exactly does the undeserved prosperity of the impious or the seeming misfortune of the pious, as well as their supervision by the gods in this and in the next life, add to the overall good of the universe? The relevant section of *Laws* X offers considerations that can be interpreted as Plato's answer to this question. God, our king (ἡμῶν ὁ βασιλεὺς), is aware that all actions proceed from souls, that all souls are associated with bodies (and hence, with vice), and that the good element in the soul is beneficial, while the bad element is harmful.[73] 'Seeing all this, he contrived a place for each of the parts where it would ensure the triumph of

71 To enhance the solemn tone of this assertion, Plato opens the passage with a quotation from Homer (*Od.* 19.43): 'This is the judgment of the gods that inhabit Olympus' – αὕτη τοι δίκη ἐστὶ θεῶν οἳ Ὄλυμπον ἔχουσιν, 904e3. Lewis 1845, 333–334 supplies a series of quotations from the Old Testament, and one from Sophocles, that reflect closely not only 'this doctrine of an ever wakeful, retributive justice', but also Plato's elevated language, especially at 905a4–b2.

72 This brings the argument back to the Aesthetic Theme. Cf. 903d1–3, and pp. 169–170 above, for the suggestion that the inauspicious position of the seemingly blameless individuals could nevertheless be useful for them and aimed at their ultimate good. Now it remains to be seen how the presence of badness, paradoxically, does not tarnish the goodness of the universe as a whole.

73 See 904a6–b3.

virtue and the defeat of vice throughout the universe in the most complete, easiest and best way'.[74] This is to say that the entire distribution of goodness and badness, reward and punishment, in this life and the next, is so designed as to proclaim the victory of virtue and justice over their opposites. A critic comments: 'this relocation of souls to places they deserve to be is what it is for virtue to be victorious in the universe; this is what the good of the universe consists in'.[75] That being said, it still remains unclear precisely what Plato is attempting to convey in the statement which announces the triumph of virtue, and how the just distribution of souls enhances the overall beauty and goodness of the world. A possible response might be that the individual in this way learns that the good element (virtue) is indeed beneficial, while the bad (vice) is harmful. Plato is explicit in this regard: 'what destroys us is injustice and thoughtless insolence, what saves us is righteousness and temperance with wisdom'[76] – the latter being divine qualities. Although ours is a world of negative duality, 'full of many good things on the one hand, many bad ones on the other, and the latter are more numerous' (906a3–5), one should be aware that the gods themselves are fighting on the side of those who engage in the perpetual battle for virtue and knowledge.[77] However, the truth is that most people fail to heed Plato's words, and neither do they learn much from experience or from precept. So, should one perhaps say that the punishment administered in return for the wrongs and pain caused by such deficient learners proclaims that justice has won victory and now reigns supreme?

The answer to these doubts should be sought, once again, by concentrating on the wider picture rather than on the particulars. According to the *Timaeus*, God made this world as good as he could – for there exist factors which interfere with God's good intentions, and simply cannot be rectified. The most significant of these factors is Timaean Necessity, but it is not mentioned in *Laws* X. Another factor is the willings, or the desires of each of us, which are the causes of what we become – ταῖς βουλήσεσιν ἑκάστων ἡμῶν τὰς αἰτίας (904c1–2). Whenever we have willings and desires, some of them are directed towards the good, but some unavoidably tend towards the bad. In other words, there

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74 ταῦτα πάντα συνιδών, ἐμηχανήσατο ποῦ κείμενον ἕκαστον τῶν μερῶν νικῶσαν ἀρετήν, ἡττωμένην δὲ κακίαν, ἐν τῷ παντὶ παρέχοι μάλιστ' ἂν καὶ ῥᾷστα καὶ ἄριστα, 905b3–6 (tr. Saunders 1970, 438, modified).

75 Mayhew 2008, 179.

76 φθείρει δὲ ἡμᾶς ἀδικία καὶ ὕβρις μετὰ ἀφροσύνης, σῴζει δὲ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη μετὰ φρονήσεως, 906a7–b1.

77 See 906a2–b3. Cf. Leibniz's *Theodicy* I.8–15, where the philosopher states that evil is an inevitable component of the best possible world, although it is erroneous to believe that the evils outweigh the goods.

will necessarily be both virtuous and vicious actions. Good actions, and their contribution to the overall goodness, are unproblematic: the gods reward them and thus proclaim the excellence of virtue. As for the vicious actions, they are not part of the divine plan, but are still present of necessity. In themselves, they do not enhance the beauty of the creation; they do so only by being rectified through punishment. A world in which moral failure is unavoidable, but at least meticulously monitored and punished, is far better than a world with sin and no punishment. What truly enhances the beauty and goodness of the world is the rectification of the unavoidable wrong, not the deserved suffering of the unjust. It is in this way that the allocation of the virtuous and the sinful souls to their respective places through the agency of the gods truly declares the victory of virtue over vice and contributes to the good of the Whole. St. Augustine, another champion of the Aesthetic Theme, must have followed a similar line of reasoning when he wrote:

> If no one in this world had sinned, the world would have been adorned and filled with natures wholly good. Also, even though sin now exists, all things are not on that account full of sin; for by far the greater number of celestial beings are good, and preserve the proper order of their nature. And the sinful will, though it refused to preserve the order of its own nature, did not on that account escape the laws of the just God Who orders all things for good. For just as a picture is enhanced by the proper placing within it of dark colours, so, to those able to discern it, the beauty of the universe is enhanced even by sinners, though, considered in themselves, theirs is a sorry deformity. (*De civ. D.* XI.23, tr. Dyson 1998, 479)

5.4 Closing Remarks

In the theodicy of *Laws* X Plato remains loyal to the strategy introduced in the Myth of Er, and repeated in the *Timaeus*: God is not to be blamed for the misfortune and the injustice encountered in this world, because the responsibility is on the agent. However, unlike in the *Republic* and to some degree in the *Timaeus*, in *Laws* X the theme of personal responsibility is totally stripped of mythical overtones, and is explained through the process of character-making induced by various willings or desires. In this dialogue, Plato also promotes the theory of transmigration and connects it closely with the Justice in the Afterlife Solution to the problem of evil: the gods, ever watchful, never fail to relegate each soul to its proper position according to its merit. No unjust deed will remain unnoticed and unpunished. Finally, the overarching strategy of

Laws x is the Aesthetic Solution, which states that the Whole is as beautiful and as perfect as it can be, while the few ugly and unbecoming parts do not blemish its beauty, but contribute to its overall perfection. And yet Plato does not deny the gravity of evil or attempt to lessen the impact of the presence of suffering and injustice. Instead, he seeks to highlight their purpose, which is at least double: (a) they have a purifying and educational role; (b) within the wider picture, they proclaim the victory of virtue over vice, by being rectified or redressed. It is through these purposes that evil and ugliness truly contribute to the beauty of the Whole – rather than by simply adding a darker shade to the otherwise bright-coloured picture.

Much of what was said in this chapter diverges from Mohr's essay on the theodicy of *Laws* x, where he makes several noteworthy statements, some of which are far from self-evident. To start with, Mohr claims that 'the *Laws*, like the *Timaeus*, interprets divinity as a demiurge (902e)'.[78] This is of minor importance for our purpose, but nevertheless interesting, since it raises at least two objections. First, Plato's earlier argument for the existence of God reached the conclusion that the universe is governed by good souls, and that these souls are gods. The Demiurge, however, is not a soul, but Intellect. Secondly, the dialogue does not state explicitly that God is indeed a demiurgic entity. As a matter of fact, in 902e Plato simply assures the reader that God, as the supreme caretaker, cannot be inferior to mortal craftsmen (δημιουργῶν).[79] The latter noun refers back to the skilled workers and qualified professionals of 902d (physicians, helmsmen, generals, household managers, statesmen), who in their line of work never neglect the parts on account of the whole, with the implication that God, whose task is to maintain the entire world, would be infinitely less prone than they are to neglect the individual beings and care only for the totality. These objections notwithstanding, Mohr is partially right. Only partially, because the gods of 902e and of its broader context cannot be equated with the divine artisan of the *Timaeus*, since, as noted above, they are souls. Nevertheless, the highest divinity of the *Laws*, who ordered and governs the heavens, is νοῦς.[80] Considering that νοῦς seems to be the supreme God of Plato's later works, and that it is called ὁ δημιουργός in the *Sophist*, *Politicus*, *Philebus* and *Timaeus*, the νοῦς of the *Laws*, by implication, may be identified with the Demiurge as well.

78 Mohr 2005, 198.

79 'Let us, therefore, never embrace the opinion that god is inferior to mortal craftsmen' - ἡ τοίνυν τόν γε θεὸν ἀξιώσωμέν ποτε θνητῶν δημιουργῶν φαυλότερον, 904e4–5.

80 See *Leg*. 966e2–4, 967b5–6, 967d7–e1.

Next, Mohr writes: 'Unlike the Demiurge of the Timaeus, however, the god of *Laws* X seems to be omnipotent'.[81] Since the God of the *Laws* is omnipotent, the presence of evil need not be explained by the presence of a recalcitrant factor, as in the *Timaeus*, and Plato therefore propounds a proper theodicy, i.e., 'verges on explaining away evil'.[82] Let us first turn briefly to the issue of divine omnipotence. In holding this opinion, Mohr finds an ally in Taylor, who states, referring to *Laws* 904a–b: '[t]here is nowhere in the universe any independent power which can cause this divine purpose to fail of its intent'.[83] Mohr believes that Taylor seeks here to establish the notion of an omnipotent God. This is, however, not the case, on account of at least two reasons: (a) the 'divine purpose' in the above case is limited to facilitating the 'triumph of virtue and the defeat of vice throughout the whole'; (b) in this section of his paper, Taylor is arguing against the description of Plato as 'polytheist'; he is not suggesting that there is no insubordinate element of any kind in the creation, but that there is no other god – maybe of evil intentions – who may be seen as a rival to 'Our King'.

Mohr considers 902e7–903a1[84] a more conclusive selection that the passage chosen by Taylor – in fact a decisive proof that the God of *Laws* X is omnipotent; yet this passage but states that the divinity is both willing and able to *supervise* or *superintend* the world, so that injustice shall never be its permanent feature. But if this is to be equated with omnipotence, then the Demiurge of the *Timaeus* is omnipotent as well, because before relinquishing his role, he entrusts his emissaries with the power to rule and steer the mortal creatures in the best and most beautiful way, as far as their wrongdoings shall allow (*Tim.* 42e).

Finally, 901d–e strongly suggests that Plato indeed does not consider God, or the gods, as omnipotent. Of the Supreme Being's three most characteristic attributes – omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence – only the first and the third are attributed to Plato's gods without any reservation: they 'know and see and hear everything',[85] and 'we have agreed that they are good – in fact, best' (901e1–2).[86] Their power, however, is restricted to what *is possible*

81 Mohr 2005, 198.
82 Mohr 2005, 197.
83 Taylor 1938, 184.
84 See Mohr 2005, 198–199.
85 γιγνώσκειν καὶ ὁρᾶν καὶ ἀκούειν πάντα, 901d3.
86 ἀγαθούς γε καὶ ἀρίστους ὡμολογήκαμεν αὐτοὺς εἶναι, 901e1–2. See also 902c2: the gods are 'most caring and most good' – ἐπιμελεστάτοις γε οὖσι καὶ ἀρίστοις, and 902e7–903a1: 'god is most wise as well as both willing and able to care'– τὸν δὲ θεὸν ὄντα τε σοφώτατον βουλόμενόν τ' ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ δυνάμενον.

for them to do, very much as in the *Timaeus*: the interlocutors agree that the gods 'can do whatever is possible for mortals and immortals': δύνασθαι πάντα ὁπόσων αὖ δύναμίς ἐστιν θνητοῖς τε καὶ ἀθανάτοις (901d7–8). This implies that some things are impossible, even for the immortals, which conforms fully to the teaching of the *Timaeus*.

If the deity of the *Laws* is not omnipotent, the theodicies of the *Laws* and of the *Timaeus*, although distinct in some respects, are not as radically different as suggested by Mohr. In other words, if God is not omnipotent, then Mohr is not justified in claiming that: 'In the *Laws* evil does not exist over and against and despite the Demiurge, but is adapted just as it is directly into his design'.[87] Indeed, even supposing God was granted omnipotence, Plato's purpose in *Laws* X may have very little to do with 'explaining away evil'.[88] To sum up: in order to prove his case, Mohr makes two claims. (A) in *Laws* X, evil is for Plato an appearance – not as sheer illusion, but in the sense that is belongs only to the parts and is not applicable to the universe as a whole; (B) although Plato does not consider evil to be a necessary condition for the existence of good, he still believes that evil contributes to the overall goodness of the Whole.[89] On the basis of these premises, Mohr concludes that 'the Demiurge's action or rather inaction with regard to small evils' – i.e., those that pertain to the parts of the Whole – 'is actually a choice for the best',[90] which implies that 'the Demiurge supposes the whole which he constructs of parts that are both good and bad is better than a whole of only good parts'.[91]

Mohr's claim (A) is both uncontroversial, and imprecise. It is uncontroversial as a reiteration of the Aesthetic Solution: the Whole is beautiful despite the presence of traces of ugliness. It is imprecise because the fact that evil belongs only to the parts does not make it an appearance in the real sense of the word; what Plato asserts is that there is badness in the parts, but it nonetheless somehow turns to be for their best, and is then *as such* integrated in the goodness of the Whole (903d),[92] a point discussed above.

As far as claim (B) is concerned, evil's contribution to the goodness of the Whole is, once again, made possible by its transformation through the wise

87 Mohr 2005, 201.

88 On the contrary, and as argued above, he acknowledges it very clearly. For badness in soul in the relevant *Laws* section, see 903d, 904b–e.

89 See Mohr 2005, 197–198.

90 Mohr 2005, 199.

91 Mohr 2005, 200.

92 Plato does not say that evil disappears by being directly integrated in the goodness of the whole; the whole point of the Athenian's argument was that the instances of badness were not neglected by the gods.

management of the gods: they turn it into a disciplinary measure for educational purposes, or it is used to proclaim the victory of virtue over vice by being redressed either in this life or the next. Evil does not contribute to the perfection of the Whole *qua* evil, but in a very specific fashion – as something that can be rectified through knowledge and practice, something that can be overcome. Understood in this way, neither (A) nor (B) adequately support Mohr's conclusions. Plato's God of the *Laws* is not inactive towards small evils, and badness is not adapted *directly* into his design; it must first be transformed into something good. Furthermore, Plato never claims that God considers the Whole, which is built out of both good and bad parts, better than a hypothetical Whole constructed of good parts only; indeed, he resents the presence of badness and tries to mitigate it.[93] Evil is an unavoidable consequence of factors beyond his power. Its direct cause is Necessity, while an indirect cause may be identified (within the limits of the moral sphere) in the soul's power to choose freely, distorted by the contact with corporeality. Given the actual state of affairs, a world constructed of entirely good parts is not possible. Therefore, Plato's intention in *Laws* X is not to dissolve the problem of evil. He offers a theodicy in line with the theodicies of the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, although less reliant on mythical motifs, and refined by the development of the Aesthetic Theme.

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93 Hence the gods' taking part in the ἀθάνατος μάχη, the eternal battle for the victory of virtue, mentioned in *Laws* 906a5.

Conclusion

Seeking solutions to the philosophical problem of evil is undoubtedly a worthwhile enterprise. The debates surrounding the problem and the theistic answers to it have not only opened new perspectives in contemporary philosophy of religion and ethics, but have also prompted developments in seemingly unrelated fields, such as modal logic and probability theory.[1] Consequently, Richard Swinburne's assertion that classical theism does need a theodicy[2] may be extended to philosophy in general. In the same article, Swinburne submits the less evident, and more controversial claim that the project of theodicy, undertaken on behalf of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God, is in fact viable.[3] In our opinion, this is too bold a statement. Indeed, well-reasoned defences of God's ways invalidate the charge that the theistic worldview is a priori implausible; a valid theodicy, however, is another matter altogether.[4] For, a proper theodicy, as understood in our modern times, must accommodate the God of the Abrahamic religions and all factual evil into a coherent world-picture.

Of course, many attempts have been made to provide the notorious morally sufficient reason(s)[5] why God would allow certain instances of catastrophes, injustice, or pain to exist;[6] among the most elaborate of these attempts are Marylin Adams' redemption theodicy, John Hick's soul-making theodicy, Eleonore Stump's meticulous and uncompromising search for justification of God against the phenomenon of human suffering.[7] Nevertheless, and despite the earnestness and ingenuity of their authors, classical theodicies hardly fulfil the task that they profess to accomplish: to the best of our knowledge, none of them does, nor can, successfully fit God into a world in which the mortal vehicles of the soul, allegedly devised by an omnipotent and omnibenevolent

1 See, e.g., Plantinga 1974b and Tooley 2019, respectively.
2 Swinburne 1988. See also Hick 2010, 6–11.
3 See Swinburne 1988, 311.
4 For the distinction between defence and theodicy, see p. 7 above.
5 The phrase refers to a reason for causing, or allowing, unfavourable events and situations, that justifies their occurrence without diminishing God's goodness or damaging his moral merit.
6 Only 'certain instances', because the assumption is that God already averts most of the evils, i.e., all those for the actualisation of which there is no sufficient moral reason.
7 See Adams 1999, Hick 2010, Stump 2010. Stump calls her solution to the problem of evil a defence, and not a theodicy, but she operates with a significantly expanded notion of defence and does strive to paint a cogent world-picture in which human suffering is not an aberration.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004679306_008

creator, are so fragile and so unnecessarily susceptible to pain on account of their very structure and constitution. To the best of our knowledge, none of them proposes a morally sufficient reason for the staggering inequalities of health, wealth, status, appearance, and intelligence, which humans encounter *at their birth* and which, to a considerable degree, define their future proclivities and actions. To the best of our knowledge, none of them offers plausible explanations that do not rely on denominational preconceived beliefs for the sufferings of mentally disadvantaged humans, and for the sufferings of the non-human animals.[8] And the list could go on.

Perhaps prompted by these and similar aporias, some classical theists adopted fundamentally different approaches to the problem of evil and theodicy. Such strategies are, for example, skeptical theism,[9] and the Thomistic construal of divine essence that rejects the deeply engrained concept of God as moral agent.[10] Unfortunately, they are hardly satisfactory either. In a word, skeptical theism does not appear to answer even the logical argument from evil, much less the evidential argument from evil; because, for this strategy to work, one must assume that there is a God whose divine purposes for allowing evil we cannot fathom – which is a form of circular reasoning. Besides, it appears to overextend the otherwise creditable principle of epistemic humility: it is very difficult to embrace the idea that God produced some greater good through, e.g., the Indonesian tsunami – a greater good that we, regrettably, are incapable of grasping. The Thomistic interpretation of God as a Being radically different from the creation, pure actuality to whom moral virtues belong analogically but who is under no moral obligation, may be good theology and may logically insulate such God from *guilt* for the evils. Nevertheless, it does not solve the problem; the knowledge that God 'transcends the categories of morality'[11] does not explain the 'whence' of evil, and consequently neither exculpates God from the *responsibility* for them. For one need not be a moral agent to generate badness: the toddler is not guilty of smothering the poor chick, because he neither intends to cause harm nor yet possesses a sense of

8 For some of the difficulties that theodicists face on account of animal suffering and for further references to the debate, see Gasser 2021, 7–8. At the time of writing, the latest essay on animal suffering is Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Pao-Shen Ho, 2022. The authors, however, argue only for a logical possibility of the co-existence of God and animal suffering, and this also within the confines of a rather narrow cultural and religious context.

9 For a recent summary of this position and further references, see Perrine and Wykstra, 2017. Draper 2017, 79–81 presents a brief rebuttal of skeptical theism as an acceptable answer to the problem of evil.

10 See Huffling 2021.

11 Huffling 2021, 6.

morality; still, he would be responsible for the chick's death, since he is the cause of its occurrence. If evil remains unexplained, i.e., gratuitous, this analogy, we suggest, becomes applicable to God and to the world in which many living entities live and die in utter agony.

Of course, one may always retort that evil is not substance but privation, not a being but a corruption of being, and that it is hubristic for the creation to judge the creator. Still, with all that said, the instances of horrendous, and apparently gratuitous evil that keep on occurring daily combine into an insurmountable mountain that conceals God from view. For these reasons, a theodicy for classical, i.e., Judeo-Christian, monotheism seems hardly possible. A successful theodicy would require a 'reconceived' God, maybe akin to the God of process theism. Or perhaps a Platonic theology and metaphysics – including an omnibenevolent but not omnipotent God, a teleological cosmos, and transmigrating souls – could accommodate a plausible solution to the problem of evil.[12] Indeed, we believe that Plato's strategies, within the frames of his late metaphysics, and examined cumulatively, do combine into a cogent theodicy.[13] Whether such metaphysics, theology, and theodicy can, or should be considered viable, is, of course, an entirely different question and a possible subject for another book. The outcome of this study is the affirmation that Plato had a noteworthy and authoritative theodicy, which should not be neglected by scholars focusing on the fields of ancient philosophy, philosophy of religion, and perhaps theology. Neither should we be discouraged by the fact that it is not presented ready-made, because only a few things are in the Platonic corpus.

Indeed, Plato's comments on the problem of evil and his theodicean reflections occur mostly as brief, scattered remarks. The most extensive continuous piece of writing of theodicean import consists of two Stephanus pages in *Laws* X (903b–905d), and yet, not even this section is universally recognised as a defence of God against the facticity of evil. These obstacles caused many modern and contemporary critics to fail to notice the theodicean aspect of Plato's philosophy. Consequently, his contribution to the important branch of theology and philosophy of religion known as theodicy has been largely neglected. We hope that these pages have demonstrated beyond doubt that

12 Where the exclusion of omnipotence answers the issue of recalcitrance and the frailty of the creation's material, the telos of the cosmos is the soul's salvation, and transmigration (and karma) explains the inequalities of birth and the sufferings of animals, of the innocent, etc.

13 For additional remarks on the possibility that a Platonic theodicy may successfully address the problem of evil, see Ilievski 2020.

this is a misguided omission, and verified our thesis that Plato indeed had a theodicy, and a significant one. Let us now elaborate on this and sum up the results of this investigation.

The analysis of Plato's theology in section 1.3 suggests that Plato may be considered a henotheist, at least in his mature period. Plato constructs a complex pantheon, in which divine Intellect reigns supreme over hosts of astral gods and other deities. All these gods are essentially good and full of knowledge. However, not even Plato's highest God is omnipotent, or, to put it differently, not even he can accomplish the metaphysically impossible, i.e., to actualise the creative act without having recourse to pre-existing corporeality and to its receptacle. As we have seen, this conception itself gave rise to a notable Platonic theodicean strategy.

Plato's religious beliefs are concomitant to his awareness of the facticity of evil. Indeed, in section 4.5 it was argued that – given some interpretational flexibility – the Leibnizian tripartite division of evil into metaphysical, natural, and moral evil is attributable to Plato and relatable to his ruminations on the problem of evil. The combination of Plato's theological convictions (especially regarding divine omnibenevolence) to his acknowledgement of the ubiquity of evil in the mortal sphere constitutes a sufficient condition for the emergence of a theodicy; no additional, nor more complex factors – such as the adherence to a strictly monotheistic theism – are required.

The main bulk of this book was dedicated to pinpointing and explicating Plato's theodicean strategies, as they can be unveiled from the relevant passages of *Republic* II and X, the *Theaetetus*, the *Timaeus*, and *Laws* X. Chapter 1 revealed that Plato, in his discourse on pedagogy in *Republic* II, expresses the first rudimentary theodicy in his corpus, and indeed in the history of philosophy. It was argued there that *Republic* 379b–c should be read as a theodicean account, albeit perhaps an incomplete one. Plato in this passage asserts that God is not accountable for evil on purely logical grounds. Once he has established that God is a being incapable of causing any badness or evil, Plato concludes that God cannot possibly be responsible for the evils experienced by human beings; the causes of these evils must be sought somewhere else.[14] Thus, in this passage, Plato absolves the deity from guilt, but leaves the reader to wonder what the causes of evil may be, all the more since these causes are denoted by a term used in the plural. Chapter 2 investigated the intriguing Myth of Er, narrated by Socrates in book X of the *Republic*. The theodicy of the Myth of Er is extremely concise, and yet very significant. In an important

14 τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἄλλ' ἄττα δεῖ ζητεῖν τὰ αἴτια, ἀλλ' οὐ τὸν θεόν, 379c6–7.

sense, it can be said to resume from where the theodicy of *Republic* II ended. The θεὸς ἀναίτιος[15] dictum of *Republic* X is a reiteration of τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἀναίτιον[16] and πολλῶν δὲ ἀναίτιος[17] of *Republic* II. However, whereas in *Republic* II it was stated only that God is not implicated, while as far the origin of evil is concerned some other, unspecified causes must be sought,[18] in the Myth of Er Plato takes a crucial step forward and identifies the cause of the troubles that pester the embodied beings. Αἰτία ἑλομένου: the responsibility is on the chooser, i.e., the moral agent. Thus a very noteworthy theodicean strategy emerges from the investigations of the myth's relevant passages; we named it the Solution from Personal Responsibility. Plato applies it to the problem of evil in such a way as to absolve God of all responsibility for the living entities' tribulations: evil arises out of each individual's free, but unwise choices. The multiplicity of the choosers may have been anticipated by Plato's suggestion in *Resp*. 379c6–7 that, as far as evil is concerned, we should leave God aside and search for other, multiple factors as a cause.

Chapter 3 was dedicated to the *Theaetetus* Digression. After considerations on the nature and metaphysics of evil, required by Socrates' terse exposé at *Theaetetus* 176a5–8, the theodicean implications of the Digression's closing section were explored. To an observant eye, it presents similarities to the strategy later known as Soul-Making Theodicy: God allows the presence of badness because he finds its justification in the incentive it gives to humans to elevate themselves morally and ultimately to flee from this world of evil once and for all.

Chapter 4 gave the *Timaeus* the attention it deserves for its theodicean significance. While the immense relevance of this dialogue to cosmology and theology is widely acknowledged, its contribution to theodicy has been overlooked – and yet it is possible to identify in its pages three theodicean strategies. The first is a Platonic antecedent of the Principle of Plenitude, the key purpose of which is to explain the diversity of the creation, which not only breeds inequality, but also entails the existence of many unwanted life-forms, as scorpions, for example. Plato's version of the Principle of Plenitude rests on the tenet that the reason for the sensible world's existence must be found in its intelligible Paradigm. And since the latter is the Living Creature in which are incorporated numerous types of entities, the variety present in this world is explained through the model-copy relationship. The sensible replica abounds

15 'God is guiltless', *Resp*. 617e5.
16 '[The good] is not responsible for evils', 379b16.
17 '[God] is not guilty for many things' [i.e., for the bad ones], 379c4.
18 τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἄλλ' ἄττα δεῖ ζητεῖν τὰ αἴτια, ἀλλ' οὐ τὸν θεόν, 379c6–7.

with various creatures because they are contained in the Paradigm, and the replica must mirror the Paradigm as perfectly as possible. Therefore, God cannot be blamed for populating the world not with gods only, but also with humans and other mortal beings. Next, we witnessed the re-emergence of the Solution from Personal Responsibility: Plato's Timaeus declared both the Demiurge and the younger gods guiltless for the failings and sufferings of the mortals, and reaffirmed the moral agent's responsibility for them. Finally, ἀνάγκη, the notorious Timaean Necessity, was interpreted as the limiting factor which prevents God from creating as good a universe as he wishes. The sensible world's innate imperfection is therefore a result of ἀνάγκη, which retains substantial residues of its original, pre-cosmic, chaotic and formless state. Once shaped with number and proportion, the primordial chaos becomes ἀνάγκη, the principle of corporeality that the Demiurge uses as the material into which he mixes νοῦς to fashion the cosmos. And because Necessity, accommodated in the χῶρα, is a factor coeternal and largely independent from the Demiurge, Plato may transfer from God to ἀνάγκη the responsibility for some of the evils experienced by the embodied souls. This theodicean strategy, which we named the Recalcitrant Entity Solution, remains unavailable to later monotheistic thinkers, because it sacrifices God's omnipotence to the mitigation of the problem of evil. However, Plato and his followers readily accommodated in their theologies a deity omnibenevolent and omniscient, but not omnipotent.

The fifth and final chapter surveyed the theology and theodicy of *Laws* x, and demonstrated that the overarching theodicean strategy developed there is the so-called Aesthetic Theme. The Aesthetic Theme, or Aesthetic Solution, defends God omnibenevolence by interpreting all instances of evil as only seemingly dissonant tones which in fact perfectly blending into, and contributing to, the splendour of the magnificent cosmic symphony. *Sub specie dei*, the world is an all-embracing Whole of goodness and beauty, and each of its large and small parts plays its appropriate role, devised to enhance the overall good. The Solution from Personal Responsibility is fruitfully employed in *Laws* x as well. Over and again, Plato emphasises that the soul's elevation or degradation depends, for the most part, on its own desires, will, and actions. Its own merits determine whether it will join the company of the virtuous, or of the vicious. Therefore, nobody may blame God for the difficulties he or she experiences; these are all earned through deeds performed in this life or in the previous. In *Laws* x, Plato also resorts to the related theodicean strategy of the Justice in the Afterlife Solution, which is meant to justify God's ways in the face of the all too frequent thriving of the unjust at the expense of the righteous. This theodicy affirms that the transgressions of the wicked will not remain unnoticed – the supervisors of the universe warrant that wicked and virtuous alike will receive

their just deserts in the next life. Despite appearances, this claim is not a mere article of faith, but a result of Plato's comprehensive efforts in *Laws* x to establish that the gods exist, that they are good, and mindful of human affairs.

If the arguments and interpretations offered in this book are valid, then Plato's theodicy is not only existent, but also complex and sophisticated, even though it has to be pieced together by collocating passages and sections dispersed unsystematically through the middle- and late-period dialogues. Plato's theodicy incorporates six main theodicean strategies, relatable to all three Leibnizian kinds of evil: the Solution from Personal Responsibility, the Soul-Making Theodicy, the Principle of Plenitude, the Recalcitrant Entity Solution, the Aesthetic Theme, and the Justice in the Afterlife Solution. The Solution from Personal Responsibility and the Justice in the Afterlife Solution answer the problem of moral evil, the Principle of Plenitude responds to the problem of natural evil, while the Soul-Making Theodicy and the Aesthetic Theme address both the moral and the natural aspect of the problem. Finally, the Recalcitrant Entity Solution is applicable to natural and metaphysical evil. In the Platonic universe, the metaphysical aspect of evil is represented by ἀνάγκη, the origin and cause of all badness – although not in the sense of evil-in-itself, but simply as something inherently imperfect and deficient. Necessity is the Platonic principle of corporeality; anything, including soul, that comes into contact with it becomes flawed and prone to degradation. Consequently, its workings are also directly responsible for the occurrence of physical deficiencies and natural disasters. And although soul was identified as the cause of moral evil, it is never so on its own; an unembodied soul knows no evil and does no evil. However, once trapped in the grip of corporeality, it is overcome by diverse degrees of ignorance and pushed towards a life of moral depravity and subsequent misery. Corporeality, or ἀνάγκη, is thus a necessary condition for the rise of wickedness, and therefore the indirect cause of moral evil as well.

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Index Locorum

Index Nominum

Ever since antiquity, the presence of evil has been considered incompatible with the existence of God. This apparent contradiction gave rise to the argument from evil, which turned into a formidable weapon against theism. Faced with this challenge, theists of all creeds have been proposing theodicies, or justifications of God's ways.

This monograph is the first book-length treatment of the subject from a Platonic perspective. Its essential message is that Plato devised a noteworthy and influential theodicy comprised of several theodicean strategies, some of which remain relevant even today. Hence, Plato's pioneering contribution to the field of theodicy deserves the attention of both philosophers and theologians.

Viktor Ilievski, Ph.D. (Central European University), is a Postdoctoral Researcher in Ancient Philosophy. He has been affiliated with the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the University of Bucharest. He publishes mostly in Platonic metaphysics, cosmology and theology, as well as on the problems of evil.

ISBN: 978-90-04-67929-0

9 789004 679290

Brill's Plato Studies Series, 15

ISSN 2452-2945

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